WARLOCK
GRIMOIRE

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Kobold Press

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OTHER VOICES, DISTANT PLANES

by Wolfgang Baur

The Warlock Patreon yielded rich fruit indeed over its first ten installments: an opportunity to visit certain topics in depth, to flesh out new locations, to offer subclasses tuned into the themes of the Midgard setting but still usable elsewhere. Not to mention a visit to the City of Brass, the warped spells of the undead of the Dry Places, and monsters from the fertile imaginings of Midgard regulars and newcomers alike. It's been one heck of a wild ride.

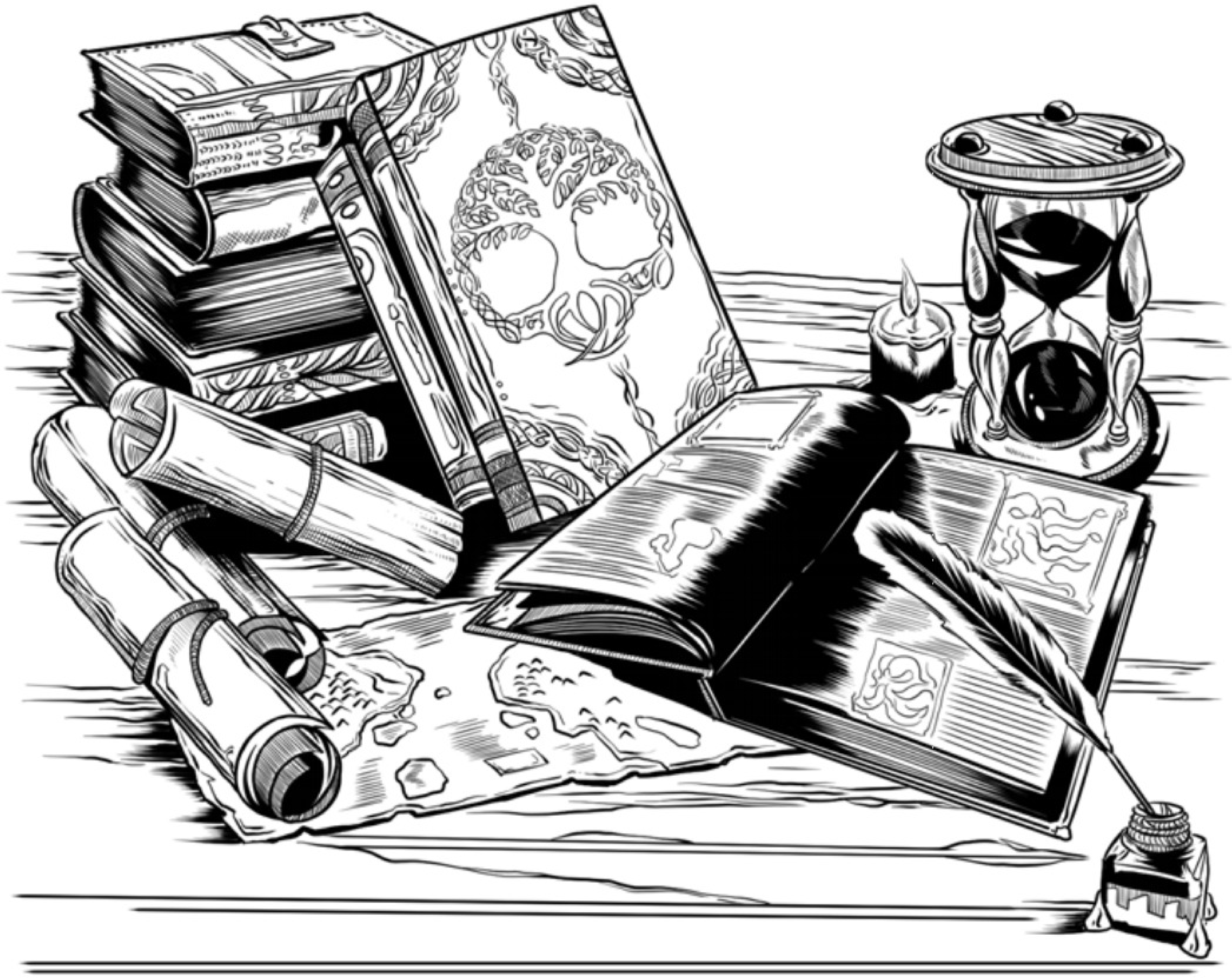
The *Warlock* zine started small, and the goals to publish a *Warlock Bestiary* and a *Guide to the Shadow Realm*… well, we were not at all sure we'd ever actually get there, much less get to this handsome volume. But secretly, I wanted this compilation very badly: the early volumes of *Warlock* have been out of print for a year or more, and part of me just believes there's something magical about flipping through paper and stumbling upon art by Larry Elmore or Justine Jones or a turn of phrase by Kelly Pawlik or Jeff Grubb.

For those of you who haven't seen all the zines, you are in for a treat, freshly organized and tuned by imp-master Scott Gable. And for those who are fortunate enough to have every single slim booklet, well… there is an entire extra zine's worth of material in this, the *Warlock Grimoire*, that's never been seen before. Can you spot it?

As often happens, I underestimated the support for good design, good art, and a darkly twisted view of fantasy. Thanks to each and every supporter for making this possible. I do fully intend to go out into the shadows again and bring back new treasures to place beside this one. For now though, it is enough to have all these secrets brimming in the pages ahead. Light a lantern, speak the words, and go out into the dark, dear readers. Monstrous things await you there, and wondrous treasures and eerie lore torn from the grasp of the dwellers in ancient tombs.

Yrs on the Dark Side,

Wolfgang Baur
Publisher, Kobold Press



LORE AND STORYTELLING

FOLKWAYS OF THE IRONCRAGS

by Wolfgang Baur

The Ironcrag Mountains are known for their dwarven halls and rich mines, and most humans and others who trade with the cantonal dwarves tend to think of them as a single nation. However, each canton sees itself as a set of halls and mines apart from the others; they are bound together by custom, but to a cantonal dwarf, each set of halls is quite distinct. Herewith, then, lie some of the distinctive customs, shrines, folkways, and forms of dress of the dwarves of the Ironcrags!

6 Joyous Festivals

While many of the festivals of the Crossroads are celebrated in the cantons, they also have rites and rituals specific to the alpine territories. Here are the most well-known.

Gunnacks Rites of Ninkash: With the harvest comes beer, ale, and celebration in the Gunnacks halls. This harvest festival consists of three days and nights of celebration of Ninkash, bread, ale, and fellowship. Enemies drink toasts to put aside past enmity, lovers make up any quarrels, and even longstanding feuds are suspended for the duration. All are welcome—though few but dwarves can sing all the songs!—and the arrival of a sacrificial cask from Vursalis or Juralt is always greeted by a great cheer and the "Blessing of the Barrels" by local priestesses.

The festival culminates with Third Night, when the Gunnacks dwarves stay up all night and sing the "Sagas of the Gunnacks Folk," an interminable ballad of more than 400 verses and double and triple refrains and choruses, which is always followed by "Toast to the Dawn," marking the beginning of winter and a new year. Even cantonal dwarves not of the Gunnacks clan tend to skip Third Night. (Traditionally, after "Toast to the Dawn," the priestesses of Lada give comfort to the dwarves who have been overzealous in their Third Night carousing.)

Twin Cheese Festivals: Held twice a year (in Bundeshausen in the spring and in Kubourg in the fall), these are two of the most delicious festivals of the Crossroads, enjoyed by anyone who eats. The local cheesemongers offer samples and sell enormous wheels of their cheese to travelers from as far away as Dornig and the Seven Cities, though most visitors are from Zobeck and the Magdar Kingdom. The four-day affair is usually accompanied by smaller side festivals devoted to honey and cider. The title of King or Queen of Cheesemakers is awarded at each festival and fiercely contested between Kubourg and Bundeshausen, though Gunnacks, Bareicks, and Juralt have won the Great Cheese Crown in past years. This is a literal crown of copper, amber, and milky pearls, and is the source of great pride for past winners.

Juralt Eggfinder Festival: In keeping with the canton's reputation for wild and even reckless disregard for danger, this small festival is a dangerous one. The Eggfinder Festival takes place in the spring as snows are melting and the griffons of the surrounding peaks are laying eggs—which the young dwarves of Juralt then attempt to steal from the nest by trickery, by stealth, by rolling decoy eggs down nearby hillsides as distractions. Each year, a half-dozen such eggs are brought into the Juralt hall, there to be hatched and trained and some to be sold to Zobeck or Magdar forces or the Templeforge priests. At the same time, it's not uncommon for one of the young dwarves to be spotted by an adult griffon and taken as prey.

Blessing of the Spears and Axes: Celebrated in both Tijino and Wintersheim (and sometimes in Bareicks and Nordmansch), this is the annual blessing of weapons prior to the departure of dwarven mercenaries for distant battlefields. In Wintersheim, this involves both priests and rune mages working together, etching runes on each weapon with magic; in Tijino and Bareicks the blessing more often takes the form of a simple line of blood on each warrior's forehead as a form of anointment with the blessing of Thor-Perun. The festival itself involves several minor rituals before the actual blessing: a two-day fast and vigil and a two-hour rite of the battle chants.

The third of the minor rituals is a ceremony waggishly called the "Boot Blessing" (more properly, the Rite of Marchers). This is more important than some young dwarves realize; the Rite of Marchers ensures all dwarves have sturdy, functional, well-fitting, and divinely blessed footwear. Given how many hundreds of miles they march, it may be an underappreciated element of the success of dwarven mercenary companies. Blessed dwarven boots are marked with the hammer rune on the sole, a clear mark for trackers and a warning to foes.

Kubourg Muleskinner's Dance: While a dance is certainly part of the events, the Muleskinner's Dance is primarily a celebration of livestock from donkeys and mules to oxen and mining ponies. All such animals are traded, blessed, and judged here. Each year, the fair's judges are the leader of the Muleskinner's Guild, the High Priest of Volund, and the High Priestess of Lada. Together, they award the golden ribbons to the finest of each type of animal, called the Golden Ribbon mule, donkey, and so forth.

Goldminer's Fair: Vast treasures—including bars of pure gold, tiny miniatures in mithral, and gemstones—are found at the Goldminer's Fair, a celebration of mining, jewelry, and precious metals in all forms. It is held, perhaps appropriately, in the Black Fortress of Grisal, which asks of all visitors a small donation called the "Coin of Khors." These funds both help the Grisal dwarves pay their ruinously huge costs for steel and soldiers and are said to curry favor with the sun god so beloved by them.

The festival itself takes place in the Black Fortress halls and is well guarded; those who come and go are always closely watched to avoid any unfortunate theft. The goldsmiths, mithralsmiths, silversmiths, and jewelers of the cantons all bring their best wares to the Goldminer's Fair, and the miners themselves come to see what works are made of the metal they have won from the deep earth.

3 Famous Shrines

Everyone knows of Templeforge, the canton devoted to Volund's rites and relics. But many other shrines exist in the cantons, some quite powerful, holy, and beloved by their neighbors. Here are three of the best known.

Bosom Temple of Gunnacks: While much of Gunnacks is devoted to Lada, there is also a strong following for Ninkash here, and the Bosom Temple is the heart of that. Built on the surface as a brewery with two enormous copper tanks embellished with images from the many legends and parables of Ninkash, the temple itself resembles a feast hall to outsiders, containing many tables and benches rather than pews; however, it also has a prominent pulpit decorated with carvings of hopvines and barley.

The high priestess is Sylvinda Gunnacks (LG female dwarf cleric [Ninkash] 7), one of the kalath who has heard the voice of Ninkash from the altar. She often warns the dwarves of Gunnacks against excessive pride and the dangers of risking too much in one mule train, teaching caution and practical matters to many generations of fire-bellied youngsters.

The temple offers food and drink to all strangers and a place to sleep for the poor or the traveler. Each night when the last prayers are said, Sylvinda's voice calls out from the door: "Children and travelers, come to the Bosom of Ninkash and rest the night. You are safe and fed among her children." Many a weary soul has listened, and sometimes an entirely impoverished group of pilgrims of Mavros or some other faith will rest there. The temple contains no gold or silver relics, no ancient anvil or holy ax, but the people of Gunnacks love it with all their heart.

Tower of Eternal Light: In Grisal, this temple is the one where most couples marry (or part) and where funerals are held for the best and brightest lights of the beleaguered canton. The High Priest of Khors is Alix Berahtum (LG male dwarf cleric (Khors) 11), though on days of special import Enzali Hackel, a paladin of Khors and the Dwarflord of Grisal, may also speak a short homily from the pulpit. Its walls are enchanted to shine with magical light at all hours, and it is justly famous for its seven bells, all cast of fine bronze and giving a clear tone that can be heard for miles.

While the tower and bells are most famous, the complex includes a small commandry of Khors paladins, an extensive list of famous generals, priests, and martyrs, and a monastery and excellent scriptorium where new copies the *Book of the Sun* are written out daily. Its library is said to also contain dozens of volumes dealing in particular with—and in great detail—the tools and tactics useful against the undead and creatures of darkness. The one best known is called *The Hammer of Khors*, sometimes known by its longer name, *The Great and True Treatise to Strengthen the Holy and Smite the Wicked*.

Thundershrine of Bareicks: The story holds that the Thundershrine of Bareicks was once a simple dwarven freehold overlooking the road between Salzbach and Hirschberg. When pilgrims there were beset by goblin bandits, they called for aid and were delighted to get some from a dwarven company calling itself the Pious Sons of Thor-Perun. The humans mistook them for priests, gave them rich gifts in thanks, and asked whether the Pious Sons might accept a donation to their temple. Not being fools, the mercenaries said yes and then quickly recruited a priest to their number and added an altar to their freehold.

Over the years, the side trip into the Ironcrags has been a popular destination for humans from Dornig seeking particular advice, weapons training, or a blessing from the thunder god, so the lie has become truth. The Pious Sons are still mercenaries, but their old freehold is now a chapel as well as a barracks. One story says that Thor-Perun was so entertained by the folly of the Thundershrine's founding, he has visited more than once in human guise and given it an aura of true sanctity.

Customs & Modes of Dress

Each canton has some element of clothing that it considers distinctive, a badge of sorts that others may recognize and respect. Among dwarves, these are often two modes of dress: one for women and one for men. Here are both the best known and some of the more obscure.

Bareicks: The dwarves of Bareicks are famous for wearing bear-fur epaulets on their jackets and bearskin hats in winter.

Bundeshausen: On holidays and special occasions, the folks of Bundeshausen wear richly embroidered dresses and jackets. The women wear a distinctive headdress like a feathered crest. The men wear wide-brimmed black hats and long stockings together with black or red-dyed leather pants.

Grisal: The dwarves of Grisal wear a great deal of black in their clothing. (The better to hide blood, they say.) On more festive days, however, they are known for their love of golden-thread embroidery on dresses and jackets, typically in sunbursts, circles, and flower designs.

Gunnacks: The folks of Gunnacks wear striped clothes on special occasions, and the most elaborate serpentine embroidery decorates their green and tan hats. (Imagine a muleskinner's wide-brimmed cap but festooned with riotous color.) The women also quilt a particular pattern of blue and white interlocked hammers, somewhat like vair in heraldry.

Hammerfell: Like Grisal, the folk of Hammerfell wear black on a day basis. (The better to hide ash and soot from the forge, they say.) However, on special occasions they wear what they call "fire-dress." For women, this is a pale-yellow dress with red apron and orange sleeves together with a set of combs and ribbons said to resemble flames. For men, fire-dress involves dark-red leather pants, orange stockings, and a shirt of as fine a linen as can be managed, woven with a few threads of gold to make it shine. Their hats resemble miner's caps, brimless but set with pins and badges representing their guilds and their status within them (typically apprentice, journeyman, wanderer, master, grandmaster, elder).

Juralt: The folks of Juralt wear furs with delight, especially ermine and sometimes sable. Their finery often accentuates these: simple white blouses and heavily embroidered aprons for the women. This is called the "mountain costume"; an even more elaborate version called "sky dress" adds layers of blue cape, white fur half-cape, and a necklace made of flowers (in season) or silver flowers or snowflake designs (in winter). For the men, the "hunting costume" is pleated kilts with tight green jackets, sometimes with a necklace of bear claws or gold coins. The more elaborate "sky dress" for them adds a heavy fur cape

with a hood entirely of a particular leather shaped a bit like a bird's head with a beak-like element sticking out from the forehead and a ruff of white feathers.

Kubourg: The wealthy folks of Kubourg tend to be among the most straightforward costumers. The women wear layered grey and black dresses with red ribbons, indicating marital status and childrearing information. For the most formal holidays or occasions, they tend to wear particular heirloom necklaces passed down and made more glittering each generation. The men wear somewhat-baggy brown pantaloons and narrow-brimmed caps of green set with feathers and cockades. Their finery is also often accompanied by gold and silver rings and necklaces.

Nordmansch: For holidays, the Nordmansch women wear bright-green dresses with red bonnets and white underskirts and blouses, and they make flower necklaces for one another. Many also carry a "holiday knife" on these occasions (often a large dagger or even a shortsword). The Nordmansch men tend to wear a "holiday breastplate," a particular piece of parade armor worn over a shirt and kept mirror-bright and possessing an edge in bright brass or even gold. Those who have no such item of luxury wear dark-green forester jackets that have been enlivened with forest flowers or stitched with the woodsman pattern of Nordmansch, showing interlocking leaves and axes.

St. Mischau: The rarely seen women of St. Mischau only appear wrapped in heavy cloaks and coverings. Little is known of their festival dress or really of their way of living at all. The men wear deep-blue woolens with bright-red jackets for holidays. At some ceremonies, they also have a particular form of beard rings they favor, which jingle when their wearer is in vigorous motion.

Templeforge: The priests and common dwarves of Templeforge wear a yellow-striped dress or jacket on holidays. Otherwise, their dress tends to the plain; their efforts are spent on metal items, which show detailed insets, chasings, and engravings.

Tijino: The men of Tijino are enamored of jaunty caps of grey or green felt. There is no level of puffed-and-slashed sleeves that they consider excessive. They compete with one another in the extravagance of ribbons and in the length of plumes, which amuses the women and entertains the children. There's no standard of holiday dress for them beyond excess. The women of Tijino are more modest, preferring white skirts and blouses set off with emerald green aprons and corsets and a large bonnet veiled with lace.

Vursalis: All adult dwarves wear rather practical holiday dress made of blue-and-white checkered cloth and distinguished with blue scarves for men and white ones for women. White fur hats are traditional as well.

Wintersheim: The unmarried women of Wintersheim wear felt hats with a particular style of red felted flower attached; if they give this flower to another dwarf, they may be offering the opportunity to court her. Married women wear a small white dragonwing design in felt instead and a necklace of anniversary rings given them by their spouses. Men often prepare elaborate beard braids and decorate their hair in thick braids set with chunks of gold or amber. Unmarried men of Wintersheim invariably wear a soft leather vest pinned with a sprig of pine needles at festivals; a dwarf who plucks the pine from his vest is expressing an interest in him as a possible suitor. Married men decorate their vests with small anniversary scales given them by their spouses. A long-married dwarf's vest may resemble golden scale armor in time; the men are usually buried in these vests.

FEAST HALLS OF THE NORTHLANDS

by Wolfgang Baur

Among all the northern folk, the feast halls and the long halls are a gathering place for entire jarldoms, families, and clans. The enormous shield-hung rafters, the roaring fire pits, and the long benches and tables are unlike the more genteel dining and drinking halls of Dornig or the south. Beyond their warmth and sense of community, they are places of boasting, song, and gossip—and quite frequently of challenges, table dances, and wild winter carousing when the snows are thick and there is little hope of travel until Freyr and Freya bring the spring.

Now then, a review of four famous halls: the **Golden Sky Hall** of the fire giants, the **Great Moss Hall** of the trollkin, **Järnhall** of the dwarves, and the **Ekollon Halle** of the ratatosk on the branches of Yggdrasil itself. While many claim to have drunk in the halls of Asgard with the valkyries, that is a tale for those whose travels have taken them beyond death to the glories of the afterlife and a struggle among the gods—that greatest hall deserves discussion another day.

Golden Sky Hall of the Fire Giants

Jotunheim and Thursrike are filled with many giantish settlements, from modest steadings to enormous cities built of stone and ancient timber. But sacred and beloved among them is the Golden Sky Hall, a mountaintop hall that humans would never have thought to build and that dwarves would mock as indefensible by anyone other than giants. It stands on a mountaintop, built of a perfectly carved foundation of cyclopean stones in a white and pink granite, topped with beams of ironwood, ancient pine, and a roof of slate.

Within the hall, the fire giant jarl, Isen Brekssen, issues decrees and appoints his jarls and underlings to gather and strengthen the giant kingdoms. Loki is said to be a frequent visitor as is the fire giant wizard Auvindrias and many rune mages (including, perhaps surprisingly, some dwarves who are on good terms with the giants). The fire in the hearth is a peculiar one, called the First Flame and said to have been kept burning from the days when the blood and bones of Aurgelmir first made the world. This fire grants a powerful tempering to those who bathe in it, sometimes hardening their skin, sometimes granting visions or power over the runes, sometimes merely restoring health and a clear mind to the sick and the demented.

Naturally, the fire giants prefer to keep this fire to themselves, but often they pretend that the central bonfire is the First Flame and laugh uproariously when foolish visitors singe their hair and cloak by climbing into it. For the especially gullible, they then offer a quaff of a fiery drink, a brandywine infused with flecks of gold to give it a fiery glitter; this,

likewise, provides no magical benefit, but those who attempt to swallow the burning concoction do entertain the giants.

The First Flame is guarded at all times by a pack of hell hounds and is often protected by an **incinis elemental** as well (see *Creature Codex*), and only Jarl Isen the Proud grants his favored guards and close friends a fire bath. Non-giants who approach it are attacked; the giants enjoy showing their bit of primordial fire, but rarely do they allow any non-giant to touch it. Those who bathe in it for more than a minute grow reddish hair and beards and increase by a size category—in the most extreme cases, a humanoid who bathes in the First Flame is polymorphed into a fire giant of roughly similar features.

Great Moss Hall of the Trollkin

From the outside, the Great Moss Hall resembles an enormous boulder along the shore of a great fjord, covered with mosses, ferns, and a few scattered pines. However, it is also clearly a long hall in its overall shape, for it has three great pine doors bound with green copper and embellished with runes of remarkable power; all those who enter are profoundly moved to peace and goodwill, and any dueling, berserker rages, or even cutting insults are extremely rare within the hall (a DC 18 Wisdom save is required to attempt violence or insult within the hall). As a result, the moss hall is a popular gathering place among the trollkin, even those who carry on ancient feuds or who have robbed, cheated, and lied their way into positions of power, for within the hall, they feel safe.

Originally built by trollkin shamans of Freyr and Freya, the Great Moss Hall is still a place of occasional ritual summonings, bindings, and great magical workings. The many shamans of the tribes and clans gather at summer solstice and at the spring and winter equinoxes to share their lore and to induct new members into their mysteries. On these rare nights, the Moss Hall also shows its remarkable acoustics; chants, songs, and invocations spoken within its stone walls echo and re-echo, gathering strength and (for those who know its secret workings) making permanent enchantments that might otherwise fade with the dawn.

As dawn approaches, a narrow bridge to the afterlife opens for ghosts, the walls of reality being somewhat thinned by the echoing chants. In the course of a night, several ghosts of famous trollkin may appear if their names are invoked and echoed by their descendants. More frequently, a banquet is laid out for one or more recently departed trollkin. Sometimes these spirits come to bid a final farewell to their clan, children, or spouse; sometimes, the offering remains undisturbed, and no spirit answers the call.

Rumor has it that a fourth entrance to the Great Moss Hall exists, either in the rafters and out through a hollow tree or down below the pebbled floor, through some trick of light and illusion into the nearby forests or to a narrow slip where a small ship can easily be moored for a quick escape. This is a place of ritual and yearly feasts led by trollkin shaman.

Järnhall of the Dwarves

A heaven for the dwarves and a place that heroes can tunnel to, though the greedy, the lazy, and the foolish will never find their way to it. Most days, the Järnhall is a place of ordinary meals and pleasant company among the dwarves of Stannasgard, but that changes on Volundag, the one day each week devoted to Volund, god of smiths and fire. On that feast night, the dwarves summon **keg golems** and toast their ancestors, sing songs of new deeds and old ballads, until midnight when the priest of Volund strikes the anvil in the closing rhythm. Then he calls out in the cadence of the Old High Dwarvish the name of one living person in the hall (almost always a full-grown dwarf but on rare occasions a child, a human, or even on one memorable night, a trollkin in deep disguise). That person's name is echoed by those feasting in the hall, and that person may ask one question of the Grindstone Oracle.

The oracle itself is a stone said to have been brought to the Järnhall by Volund himself, a bit of sandstone brought up from beneath the ocean, which speaks answers to questions once each day when it is turned by the priestess Marda Longfinger. The questions themselves reflect all of the aspirations, fears, and hopes of the Stannasgard dwarves: "Does Igrim still live?" or "Where have the ogres of the Greencap band gone?" or even "Why does my journeyman blade never keep its edge?" or "Who put a hole in my longship last winter?" The other priests and the clan elders are called about as often as the miners, smelters, cooks, and bellows-pumpers; the results are sometimes trite and sometimes momentous, but in all cases, the feast hall closes as soon as the answer is given, and any recriminations and consequences take place in just a few minutes after midnight.

The following day, the dwarves return to work to assist their siblings and their children, teaching the songs of the dwarves, passing on the lore of iron and the secrets of gold and silver, and weaving ring magic to give as gifts to various friends and cousins and elders of their halls. They dream of the next feast night, and the mysteries or trivialities that the Grindstone Oracle may next reveal, and the young dream of adventure while the elderly dream of days long past and the day that the anvil-priest called their name. For the custom of the Järnhall is that each dwarf who lives in Stannasgard is called by the oracle at least once in their lifetime, though none know if that call comes in youth or old age.

Ekollon Halle

Clarahekkarina, the queen of the ratatosk of Yggdrasil, is the hostess and lady of one of the strangest feast halls of the planes, the Ekollon Halle, which is literally cradled in the branches of Yggdrasil at the heart of the Great Branching where five major segments of the World Tree join together and where the ratatosk have their largest settlement—the planar town of Grenstad, home to more

than 4,000 ratatosk and smaller numbers of aasimar, tieflings, ravenfolk, and planar humans. The feast hall there is a woven one with rafters and roof that use both living branches of Yggdrasil and bright green-and-silver leaves in its roof as well as its doors, benches, and some walls of carved wood. The whole place smells of greenery and life, and the fires are enchanted ones of blue and yellow flames, unable to ignite wood or leaves but entirely hot enough to toast nuts, warm cider, and cook the richly flavored gryta (a stew) that the ratatosk eat with such abandon.

Most feasts at Ekollon Halle are held according to a lunar calendar, though seeing the moon through the branches of Yggdrasil requires a bit of arcane gift; ratatosk and many druids have no trouble with it, though most warriors and certain non-planar creatures do not find the lunar orb to be at all obvious. In any case, three times per month, the hall resonates with large crowds of ratatosk chittering as well as the songs and accents of many friends, allies, merchants, and travelers—for Queen Clarahekkarina permits all creatures to attend so long as they fit through the (relatively modest) eight-foot-tall doors.

The feasts themselves are festivals of gossip, of mercantile excess with chests of gold and bolts of fine cloth and spices and jewelry and the finest nut flour all changing hands amid the crowd. The love of bargaining seems to consume some of them, for the ratatosk are nothing if not a gregarious, freewheeling bunch at the feasts. Trading for any item of novelty can be quite fierce—but their curiosity and love of new things is quite short-lived. Any item brought to Ekollon in great amounts is seen as interesting but no longer worthy of swift pursuit.

The end of a feast at Ekollon arrives when the queen retires to her chambers with a group of favored maidservants and courtiers. Other ratatosk take this as a sign that matters are concluded; no more deals or bargains may be struck. The entire hall usually empties in an eyeblink, and aasimar and tieflings are sometimes bemused to find themselves suddenly in an empty hall with rattling bowls of cold gryta and a scattering of harried human servants.

FEAST HALL NPCS AND RUMORS

d20	RESULT
1	Strangers are rarely welcome at this hall; visitors are given shoddy food and weak ale, snubbed, and ignored unless they can earn respect with a round of poetry or a display of wit and riddling.
2	A contest of boasting and bragging (see flytting in the *Midgard Worldbook*) is underway. Any character of high Status in the party or any bard is invited to join in.
3	An enormous wolf or giant eagle enters the feast hall at speed, steals an huge roast from the high table, and leaves before anyone can stop it. The lady of the hall offers a reward to anyone who brings her the animal's head (but it may be a shapeshifter).
4	All the menfolk of the hall fall asleep as the women of the hall have put a sleeping draught in their cups. While the men sleep, the women perform a ritual involving a mystery of Boreas and the Snow Queen, summoning winter's power to themselves.
5	The lord of the hall proclaims his wish for a display of magic and sorcerous power—without harm coming to anyone in the hall. Is there an arcane caster who wishes a boon from the ruler? Then the performance had best be wondrous and memorable.
6	Several of the male warriors of the hall are harassing one of the younger serving wenches. A shieldmaiden with a single eye calls them pigs, and the whole feast seems about to turn into a violent brawl. Can a gentle word dissuade the drunken warriors, or must the heroes find a way to end a full-blown melee?
7	One of the lord's housecarls is in love with the lady of the hall, and the two are making no secret of it while the lord himself is away. Several of the lord's friends in the feast hall are deeply offended and storm out.
8	Two drunks begin insulting each other and decide to pick on one of the PCs. The more creatures that get involved, the angrier the lord of the hall becomes; those who wound or kill another guest are arrested and judged for breaking the laws of hospitality.

9	The food at the feast is suddenly filled with maggots and flies, and the drinks all turn to foul sludge. A necromancer or void mage has drawn all the life energy from the meal, infusing the substance with necrotic energies instead. Those who ate of it are sickened and nauseous, moving half speed and with disadvantage on all checks until they take a long rest.
10	A tiny **eridna** comes to the hall with a message, but it can barely be seen or heard among the larger folk. It asks for one of the PCs to deliver a scroll of very bad news to the lord or lady at the high table and departs before anyone questions it.
11	A guest at the feast is poisoned; he sat next to one of the PCs, who immediately falls under suspicion as a stranger and (perhaps) a person of low character, known for slaughtering monsters and civilized folk alike.
12	The fire in the hearth speaks with an elemental's voice, delivering a prophecy of doom and danger to all those in the hall. It speaks Draconic or another language that only one of the PCs understands; all others are simply frightened and confused.
13	An **alehouse drake** settles itself on one of the feast hall tables and claims a toll of food or drink from anyone seating themselves at the same table. This is charming at first, but the drake seems to grow in size far more quickly than anyone would expect, and in time, its weight cracks the table beneath it, its color shifts to a flame dragon orange, and it demands gold and jewels before leaving.
14	A band of trollkin raiders arrives, still bloody and in high spirits from robbing travelers on a nearby road. They share tales and bits of loot with the lord or lady of the hall in exchange for food and drink.
15	A valkyrie comes into the feast hall, her saddlebag bulging with chosen souls. She does not speak to anyone unless she is addressed with respect; the servants and housecarls give her meat and mead and leave her alone. Anyone pestering her with questions must pass a DC 15 Charisma check or be given a baleful glare and a warning. Those who do not heed her warning are struck by her spear and suffer a permanent loss of 1d8 hp as their fate is darkened by the valkyrie's dark touch.
16	A ravenfolk doom croaker comes and offers to read the wyrd of anyone who asks for a modest fee (3 gp). Those who accept gain advantage on their next roll if they are described as "victorious and blessed," or they gain a curse that haunts them for a week as their fate closes in on them in dreams and visions.
17	The lord and lady of the hall seem unusually agitated, and when the feast is half done, they call for a toast: "To the Immortal Void and all the powers of blood and darkness! Drink with us or be doomed to die this very night!" Their housecarls are alarmed, their priest is horrified, and everyone tries to figure out how and why they are possessed. (Dopplegangers have taken their place.)
18	A hill giant comes to the feast hall with a gift: an enormous salmon the size of a pony. The giant offers it for sale to the chef in exchange for a barrel of ale.
19	Two elves enter the hall, walk through it, and open a previously invisible doorway or portal at the far end. They step through and leave the door a tiny bit ajar. Will anyone dare to follow them to some mysterious road?
20	Loki is a visitor at the hall, and he seeks to convince the adventurers to help him in an act of mischief or petty thievery.

THE FORBIDDEN MOUNTAINS OF BELDESTAN

by Wolfgang Baur

Beldestan is a high, arid land with little more than goats and pastures—and mines filled with mithral and steel for those strong enough to hold them. For long ages, it was the heart of the dwarven Trakhan Kingdom, a place of great industry and dozens of well-fortified hill fortresses and clan halls dug deep into the hills.

In more recent years, the dwarves' rule fell to banditry and dark magic, and the clans abandoned the mines for the Towers of Khubara. Several human hill tribes took over the ruins and kept its mines open, though only by allying themselves with forces of darkness.

The Satrapy of Beldestan has become a place of casual violence and constant feuding. Indeed, the families kill and betray one another as entertainment, and tribal loyalties run deep. The ruling noble houses—Bastun, Yllomir, Kluchiss, and Plendremin—largely prefer to make their slaves do the mining, and all travelers are considered fair game. Mine owners and petty lordlings often hire gnolls and dwarves as slavers, many of whom have settled in the cities and ruins of Beldestan.

Slaving, goat-stealing, bride-theft, and kidnapping are all common in Beldestan. Those who cannot keep their families safe are mocked as weaklings and cowards.

Dark Temples and Ancient Wisdom

Beldestan is known for being one of those rare places that praises dark gods openly and with great gusto. The Beldestanis consider their pantheon stronger and more practical than the high-minded angels or rapacious dragon gods of nearby kingdoms. Indeed, human sacrifices are part of everyday life in Beldestan, for its priesthoods demand blood and treasure in return for their blessings. Beldestan is fiercely loyal to a range of dark gods and has built temples to a dark Veles of the Void as well as to Khorsa, to Sabateus, and much darker gods still—darakhul monks and dhampir priests are rare but not unknown. Few linger long in Beldestan: the weak are often bundled off to mine iron or mithral until they die, and the strong seize what they can and leave for more congenial pastures.

Stairs of Beldestan

Beldestan has long been a site of pilgrimage, a direct route from dusty earth up to the heavens where enormous creatures soar and carry sacrifices to the gods. The base of its monumental stairs is well known for the efficacy of the invocations offered there, but very few other than the most faithful dare venture up the stairs themselves: enormous eagles, howling winds, and various inimical undead make the stairs a place that few find congenial for long.

Those who climb the full height and return, however, are favored in the eyes of the gods, and certainly, accomplishing such a feat is a daring and worthy endeavor. Many have set off for the heights, and but a few have returned, somewhat scarred and sometimes wiser for the effort.

True heroes might have several reasons to climb the stairs:

- To acquire a quiver full of roc feathers at a mage's request
- To prove their worthiness to an order of champions
- To reach the meadow of stones where a powerful drake shares prophecies
- To visit a great void dragon's citadel at the edge of the void and sail the astral winds
- To carry a message to an archmage who lives at the top of the stairs, a member of house Plendremin

Towers of Khubara

On Beldestan's northern border, beyond most of the ruins that dot its landscape, the dwarf descendants of Trakhan live in one small city-state high in the steppes, flanked by towering mountain peaks and paying a nominal tribute to the Satrapy of Beldestan. The Towers of Khubara is a mixed nation of dwarves, humans, and a scattering of other local races. The city of Khubara is formed primarily of tall towers, and those who dwell there take the height of their dwelling as a matter of pride and status. Bridges and walkways span the gaps between the towers, and a traveler can walk from one side of the city to another and never touch the ground.

The skilled craftsmen here produce many goods for trade with Beldestan and beyond. The swiftest falcons in the world are bred

hereabout. Smaller than peregrines, they have red feathers on their breasts and are famed for their speed and skill. Turquoise is found in great abundance in these mountains as are plentiful seams of iron, mithral, and a unique form of metal called *ada*, which is used to make wave-washed steel. On a critical hit, weapons made of this form of steel can shatter an opponent's shield or armor, reducing their AC by 1 until it is repaired.

Towns and Clanholds

Beldestan is littered with hundreds of tiny villages, freeholds, and crossroad towns, each protective of its special status, its road taxes, and its peculiar traditions, from the cultivation of ebon frogs to the trepanation of blasphemers to outright slavery. Here are a few of its larger steadings and familial strongholds.

Bastun's Hold: A family of human mining barons took over the richest of the dwarven Al Trakhar mithral mines here and has kept it in their hands for three generations. The town itself is half on the surface and half in dwarven halls repurposed for human heights and decorations. A dwarven gatehouse called the Giant's Skull has become the seat of power and counting house, where precious metals are stored. The local warlord, the Khan Jan Sardhana al-Bastun (LE male human eldritch knight 12) is a follower of Vardesain and feeds troublemakers to a deep pit called the "Pit of Ghouls." It is said that many of his helmeted guards are not human but simply darakhul, expanding the Hunger God's power here. Certainly the bodies of Khan Sardhana's enemies often disappear without any trace, and priests of gods of sun, life, and justice rarely survive a visit to Bastun.

Galna: The capital city is home to a dozen sites of great power and great horror: the enigmatic Knotted Ley Line of Galna puzzles all arcanists, of course, but also of note are the gambling halls in the Cloud Temple of Azuran, the Blood Caverns of Vardesain, and the Echoing Cathedral of Veles, often visited by emissaries from the Mharoti lands (who tend to depart quickly once their offerings are made). In addition, the monthly rites of the Goat of the Woods are considered either horrific or strangely attractive to visitors: they take the form of something like a public orgy in the Horned Temple of the Ebon Moon, though invariably several of the participants are never heard from again.

At its heart is the vast palace called the Seat of Beldes Wisdom, a marble-halled home to the Autarch Alestos and his harem of 33 beautiful men, women, catfolk, gnolls, and (so it is said) dopplegangers able to take the form of gods or devils with equal ease. Some of these are wives with status, others are gifts from kingdoms as far away as Sailendra and Nuria Natal, and others still are ambassadors or travelers unfortunate enough to catch Alestos's eye and retained as little more than prisoners.

ADANISK OR ADA (WAVE-WASHED STEEL)

Adanisk is a very rare type of steel that has a unique wave-like pattern and is light, flexible, and very strong.

When crafted from iron, ada metal, and natural woods, wave-washed steel becomes a wonderful material from which to create beautiful weapons. Armor is almost never crafted from adanisk. Other items not primarily of metal are not meaningfully affected by being partially made of adanisk. (A longsword can be a wave-washed weapon, while a staff cannot.)

The Seat of Beldes Wisdom surrounds and is interpenetrated by the Indigo Halls of Sabateus, the temple of the mysterious void-ridden god of stars and magic who is much loved by the autarch and many of the realm's wealthiest bandits, dukes, and archmages. The Indigo Halls are home to the immensely powerful Khatun Bibi Kaftar, sometimes called the Empress of Beldestan, and she rules the spiritual life of the Satrapy with a stern predilection for law and order.

The Indigo Halls of Galna are said to house more than four hundred priests and priestesses of various degrees of wisdom, from the Indigo initiates to the blind seers and devoted souls of the elder ranks. The priesthood makes its way among the Indigo Halls through Living Doorways, hallways, and entire rooms decorated in silver mirrors and studded with star-like ceilings made of gems and lapis lazuli. A hundred ghosts and phantoms of the priests buried in its walls are said to watch over the kingdom, and certainly, *magic mouths* and similar spells discourage petty thievery of its gems, sacred scrolls, and mummified relics.

Grove of Silence: Also called the Bleating Grove or the Grove of Bitter Bliss, this forested mountain valley is largely uninhabited by humanoids. The primary residents are selang, or "dark satyrs" (see *Tome of Beasts*) devoted to the worship of the Goat of the Woods and similar dark gods. The sound of their pipes under the dark branches keeps most woodcutters at bay, and the small shrine on the forest's one good path is heaped with the hearts of sheep, birds, and other animals. The leader of the selang is a young and cheerful captain of his forest band, deeply fond of the dragonpipe and called the Devourer of Secrets. He visits Galna once each month to lead the revels there, always seeking to ensnare priests or priestesses of Sabateus.

Kulchiss & the Kulchiss Pass: A mithral mine has kept some dwarves occupied in this high mountain town where snow is common for eight months of the year and the shepherds and miners yet retain a fierce joy in life. The town is known for its talented musicians as well as for banditry, metalwork, and a devotion to raiding "lowlanders"—the town has always been on the verge of rebellion, and the arrival of its taxes to the autarch seem perpetually in doubt. However, in years where no wealth is forthcoming, the citizens of Kulchiss do not mock or belittle the autarch but merely claim that the "mountain's share" was given to otherworldly creatures on the peaks of Mount Ashatabar. The Autarch has never mounted a punitive expedition against Kulchiss Pass, though he has been known to be demanding of additional soldiers from Kulchiss to serve in the ranks of his armies.

Plendress: Home of the Plendremin family of wizards, sorcerers, and oracles, the family stronghold is a castle built on a large plateau accessible only from the air or through tunnels dug into the rock. They keep a stable of hippogriffs and a small breeding colony of rocs (fed on taxes levied in sheep and goats). Their command of the air and their swift passage from one place to another means many are believed to be servants of Boreas or Azuran.

Red Fields of Yallomena: These fields grow poppies in vast swaths, watched carefully by the priests of Veles by day and by a cadre of extremely devout gnoll-ragers of Veles by night. When harvested and distilled into a gummy resin, the resulting tinctures and pipesmoke are found throughout Beldestan in smoker's dens and thieves' quarters. The addictive, lethargic, dream-inducing material is commonly referred to as "dragonsmoke" or a "dragonpipe."

SATRAPY OF BELDESTAN

Symbol: A blue field set with three golden eyes.

Ruler: Autarch and Most Puissant Magus of the Darkening Heavens, First Speaker of the Void, Beloved of Veles and Sabateus, King of the Mountains, Keeper of the Stairs, Ozymandrite Alestos the First (NE male human wizard 19).

Important Personages: First Counselor Yrsinestra the Wise (LE adult female void dragon); Chamberlain of the Stairs Olessy Plendremin (CE male human wizard 9); Shalena of the Seven Fists (NE female human monk 12); High Eclipse-lord Rugansta Yllomir (LE male human cleric 9 [Chernobog]); Tarpin the Black (LE male darakhul priest 11 [Vardesain]); Khatun Bibi Kaftar, Indigo Heirophant, Beloved of Sabateus (LN female human cleric 15 [Sabateus]).

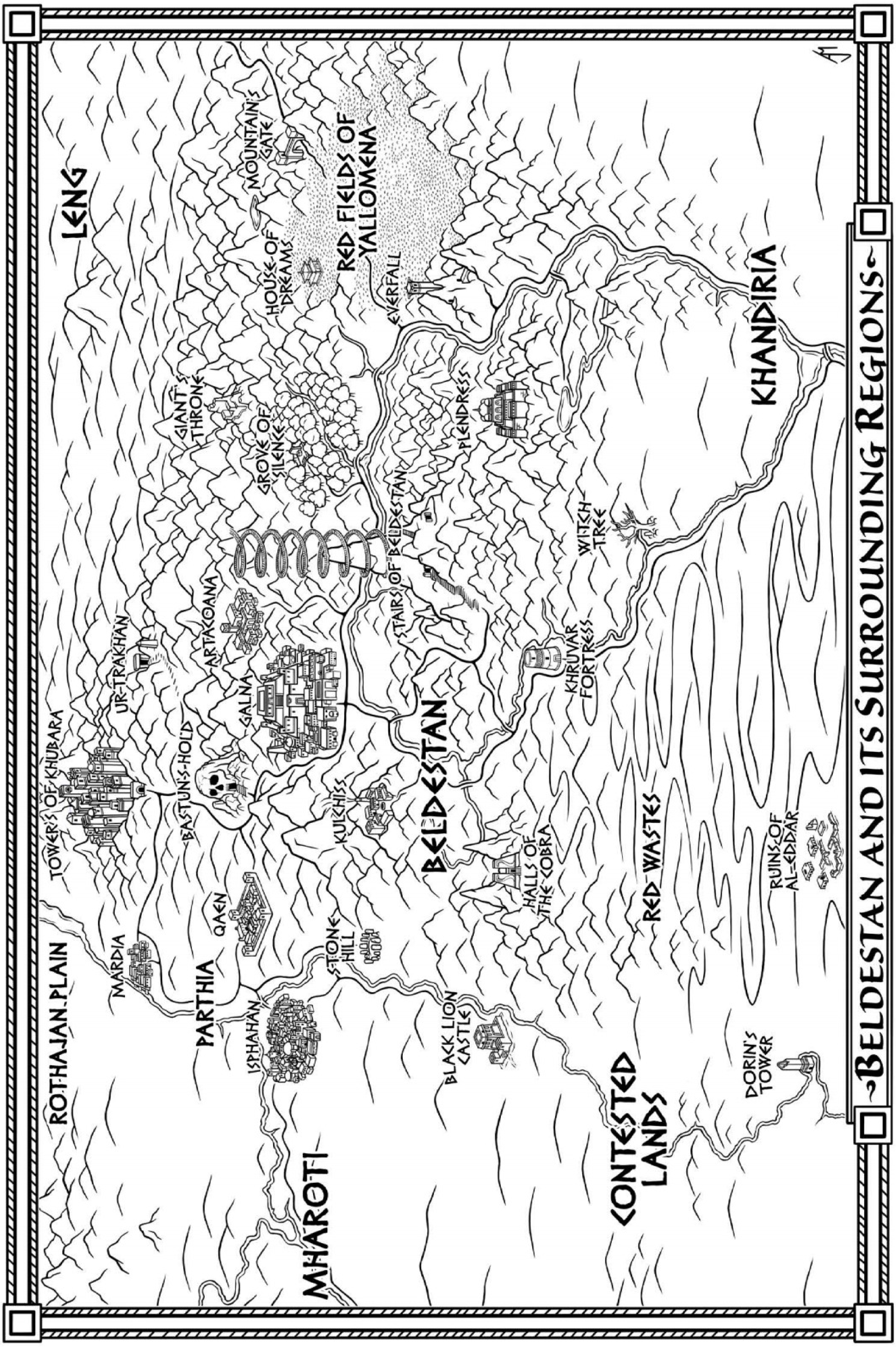
Population: 184,000 humans, 20,500 gnolls, 15,000 dwarves, 5,000 goblins, 4,000 darakhul, 2,000 gnomes.

Capital: Galna, population 10,200 (9,000 humans, 700 gnolls, 500 goblins).

Towns: Bastun's Hold, population 8,000 (7,000 humans, 1,000 darakhul, 500 gnolls); Kulchiss, population 6,000 (4,500 human, 1,000 dwarves, 500 gnolls); Ur-Trakhan, population 5,000 (2,000 humans, 3,000 dwarves)

Great Gods: Azuran, Goat of the Woods, Sabateus, Vardesain, Veles of the Void

Trade Goods: Turquoise, lapis lazuli, iron, mithral, ada, poppy juice and resin, indigo, barley, sheep, goats, carpets (in order of total output)


Beldestan and its Surrounding Regions
Leng
Mountain's Gate
House of Dreams
Red Fields of Yallomena
Everfall
Khandiria
Giant's Throne
Grove of Silence
Plendress
Stairs of Beldestan
Witch Tree
Ur-Trakhan
Artacoana
Galna
Khruvar Fortress
Towers of Khubara
Bastun's Hold
Beldestan
Kulkhiss
Red Wastes
Ruins of Al-Eddar
Halls of the Cobra
Qaen
Rothajan Plain
Mardia
Parthia
Stone Hill
Isphahan
Black Lion Castle
Dorin's Tower
Contested Lands
Mharoti

SHIFTING SEAS: NEW ADVENTURES ALONG THE WEST COAST ROAD

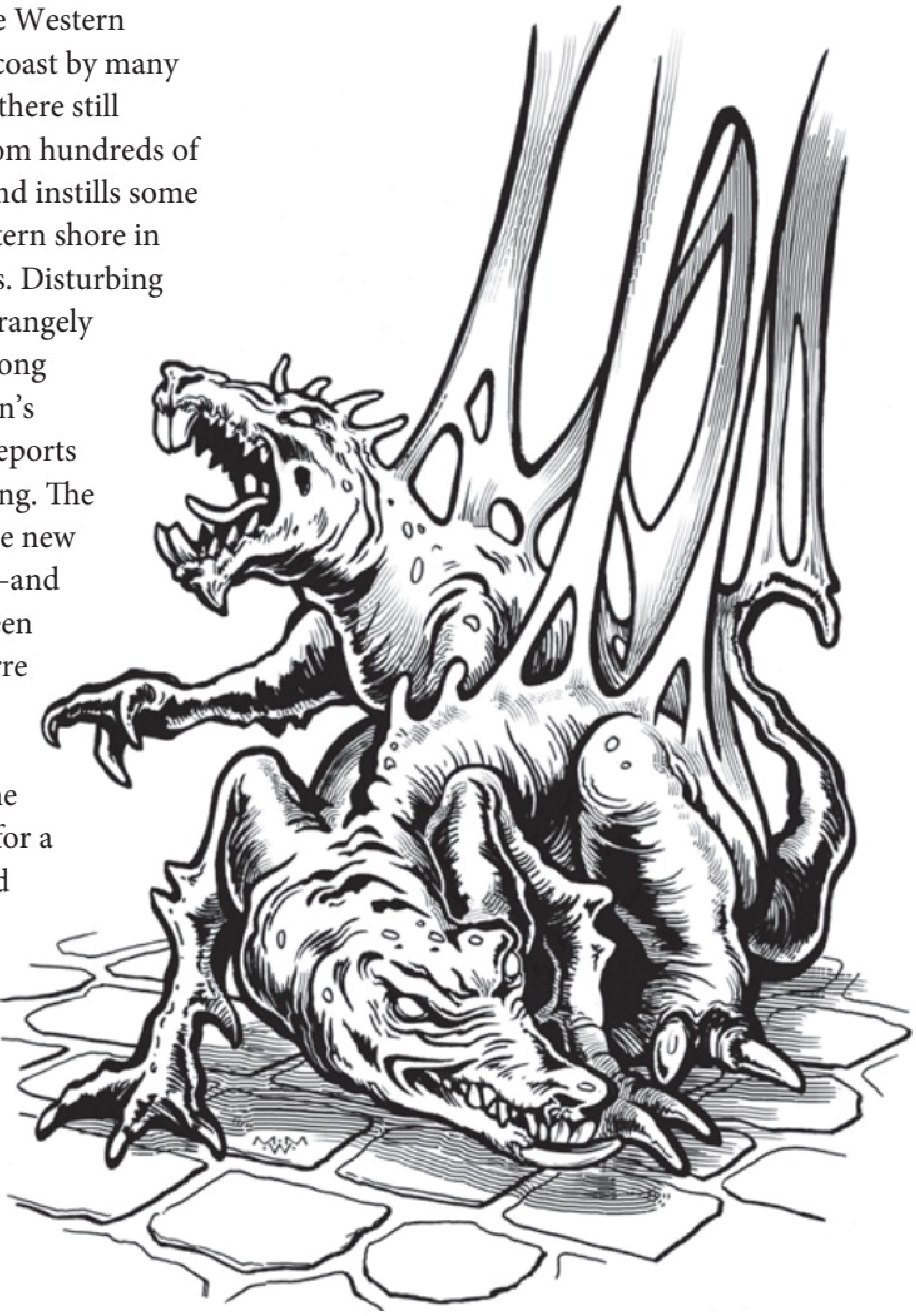
by Brandon Hodge

The unchaining of Nethus from his imprisonment promised new fortunes for the sea god's former wardens and an unforeseen boon to his scattered priesthood. With the seas once more under Nethus's dominion, the ocean currents and navigable waterways have finally settled into a somewhat predictable pattern. But this trade-off has not been without cost, for the geological shudders of this shackled god's release have caused great tumult along coastal communities with many seaside villages suddenly finding themselves inundated with water as the tides shifted to reflect his unleashed whims. Dangerous currents lash out in new patterns, churning up unknown ruins and treasures awaiting discovery along the coastal road of the Western Sea. To those who live there, it is a generation of unease as Nethus exerts his turbulent will and reshapes the seas in volatile patterns, reflecting his new partnerships upon his release from human imprisonment. But for those seeking to exploit this confusion or those seeking adventure, there has never been a better time to trek the coastal paths between Barsella and Cassadega and see what mysteries have been uncovered by the churning of the deep.

The Southern Stretch

Of all of the coastal communities of the Western shore, Barsella has benefitted the most from the shifting seas, enjoying substantially calmer currents. But the subdued tides have created festering pools of stagnant water near the poorest districts of the city, including Shanty Town, Whore's Lot, and the Wash. The poor inhabitants of these districts blame the pools for the spread of a virulent plague known as the Grey Wasting, which has devastated the neighborhoods. One prominent merchant family claims to have a cure for the disease in the form of a strange tonic known as Hubart's Remedy, which has been in such demand that local vendors strap kegs of the elixir to their shoulders and dispense it on the streets to long lines of waiting patrons. And while it seems to subdue the worst of the plague's symptoms and stave off certain death, the cost of the preventative medicine is high, and the poor have resorted to an unbalanced system of barter to pay off their debts to the makers of the potion—including giving up their claims to any near-worthless shanty houses or real estate they may possess. Local authorities have turned a blind eye to what many citizens believe is a massive land-grab scheme, and riots have broken out on rumors that the same family behind the cure is responsible for infecting the population with the plague in the first place. Official investigations have stalled, so the afflicted communities seek enterprising freelancers to investigate tales of wererat plague couriers, a secretive Ouroboros cult, wealthy landowners with big plans for cheap land, and a mysterious, highly guarded elixir brewery in the bogs north of the city. But few remain to take the inhabitants up on their offer since the threat of illness has caused something of an exodus in enterprising freelancers who instead make their way to the more untamed regions to the north in search of adventures less likely to wrap them up in deadly social intrigue that might involve the city's most powerful patrons—or worse, infection by a deadly plague.

Though the outer edges of the Western Wastes are removed from the coast by many leagues, the warped landscape there still manages to produce threats from hundreds of miles away as if the parched land instills some thirst for the waters of the western shore in some of its most vile occupants. Disturbing news from Maravahr tells of strangely mutated creatures skittering along its streets at night, and the town's community of hedge witches reports their familiars have gone missing. The sheriff has set a bounty on these new creatures—small and hairless—and the few specimens that have been caught typically resemble bizarre rodents or some strange cross of inbred felines and canines. Rumors persist that the creatures are advanced scouts for a horrific beast moving westward from the wastes, hiding by day on the southern border of the Ghostlight Forest. If the testimony of crazed survivors of the creature's onslaught can be trusted, it is described as an immense being composed of thousands of small, mutated mammals that detach and rejoin its horrid deliquescing form while chittering horribly. Famous familiar breeder Bixby Barnum of Bemmea theorized that the horror was the amalgamation of the degenerate descendants of the destroyed magocracies' masterless familiars and that the central mass was hunting and absorbing other magically enhanced creatures and growing in both size, cunning, and spellcasting ability. This enterprising gnome was last seen traveling to investigate the monstrosity's last known whereabouts, near a village east of Maravahr, in hopes of recovering lost familiar genetic strains from the creature's detached scouts and has not been heard from since.



The Ghostlight Menace

The stretch of coastal road that borders the Ghostlight Forest between Maravahr and the town of Fellmire is perhaps the most dangerous of the region. Travelers report that the coastline has shifted farther inland, disturbing an ancient landmark of over a dozen gigantic cairns in the pocket of a now-inundated cove. The crashing of high tides has eroded the stacked stones in recent months, and their huge, fossilized contents have spilled forth and scattered along the rocky shore. Subsequent reports have described towering, ghostly figures standing in the waves after sunset, their dead eyes staring toward the sea, and their mouths agape in a mournful howl, driving anyone hearing it mad and forcing them into involuntary servitude to drag the fossils back to their resting places. However, the labor of lifting the gigantic bones is too much for most human hands. Travelers wake from their stupor with the rising of the sun to find themselves exhausted and their hands torn and bloody from the fruitless task.

North of these howling giants is the small seaside village of Goatshead. The village was founded at the height of the Great Mage Wars by servants of the sun god Khors. They relied on the sheltered cove's protection as they hunted groves deep in the Ghostlight Forest sacred to the then-emerging Black Goat of the Woods, collecting the town's high bounties for the heads of followers of this corruptive religion, giving the village its unique moniker. But as homage to the god waned and the servants of Khors departed to seek evil elsewhere, the village was left unprotected, and soon the corruption they once combatted took root in the heart of their former residence. The waystation that once served as a headquarters for the paladins of Khors now hides a local cult devoted to the Black Goat herself, and the rooms that once housed the holy warriors are now open to weary travelers traversing the coastal road. But many have disappeared from the inn, and others report finding secret panels above their beds that might be used for abduction or murder, leading to troubling talk that sleeping victims are dragged from their beds and toward the Mother's Grove where they are sacrificed by the Black Goat's flock. Rumors persist that the old, heavily trapped caves beneath the former headquarters guard a portion of the *Viridian Codex*, once recovered by the servants of Khors, and both the church and the aspiring mage-king Anton Valcrist of Bemmea have returned their attention to the forgotten secrets buried beneath the small village, and great rewards may await those who enter the inevitable struggle over the recovery of the artifact.

The peninsula on the coastal road between Goatshead and Fellmire has become more dangerous recently as hill giants and ogres have begun ransacking caravans along a lonely stretch of road that ventures too close to the borders of the Ghostlight Forest. It may be that the dire reputation of the Pit of Caernath some 50 miles east has begun to take its toll on adventurers willing to explore that corrupt demesne, forcing the followers of the giant blood mage Hjiorlech to venture farther afield to capture sacrificial victims for their master. The local bandit chieftain known only as Crooked Tod is furious with the unanticipated competition and is said to have developed a plan to attract the wandering ghosts of wayward giants to latch onto the soldiers in the blood mage's raiding parties. This plan could very well incapacitate the giant raiders and send them homeward or toward the Spokes for possible respite, but Crooked Tod lacks the resources to execute the dangerous plan himself and seeks adventurers who don't mind being paid in ill-gotten wealth to do his dirty work for him.

The Fellmire Dregs

The coastal road ends at Fellmire, but with the shift of currents due to Nethus's new-found freedom, travel around the treacherous swamp via coast-hugging vessels has become safer and more commonplace. This makes the much longer overland journey through Sagefall and the Mage Road somewhat less favorable to those travelers not headed for Maillon, much to the consternation of the town's merchants, hostelers, and elders. But the trek via ship to Cuculla, Bemmea, or even Cassadega is not without its dangers. Lurking in the currents is a new threat: the wispy, quavering tentacles of some surviving Great Old One previously trapped in an undertow since the events of the Great Mage Wars. Though biologically frozen in time like the other wasteland walkers, the changing currents have now moved it closer to the coast where the near-transparent appendages of this forgotten and unnamed threat undulate freely with the tides like some enormous dead jellyfish. A mere touch of only one of the creature's tendrils can warp the very fabric of sea-going vessels and their crew, and reports of rapid aging, madness, physical corruption and mutation, and outright disappearances are all lent credence by some of the nearby villages' strange, raving inhabitants said to have come into contact with the phenomenon. One tentacle washed ashore near Fellmire, warping the flora of the swamplands and bringing new, sentient life to many of the plants there, which thereafter attacked the coastal community and managed to rapidly overgrow some buildings on the town's outskirts, covering them in thick vines with footlong thorns. Ongoing efforts continue to prune back the threat, and though the townsfolk believed the overgrowth would cease if the washed-up tentacle was destroyed, the effects have persisted even after adventurers were hired to amputate the appendage at the shore. And while the nearly transparent tentacle is now gone, the adventurers never returned to receive their payment, and townsfolk report spying several members of the party on the outskirts of the community, now covered with bark, branches, and leaves while speaking in a strange, raspy tongue.

Halfway between Fellmire and the crystalline spires of the Salt Fortress rests maligned Maillon, and the recent surge of tides has done little to upset the precarious balance of work and habitation that the obsessive alchemists that make up the bulk of its population call life. But recently, strange humans have begun emerging from the nearby swamps: confused, ragged, and weary from weeks of travel. Speaking in strange, ancient dialects that evade translation through magical divination, local scholars with rudimentary skill in extinct tongues have determined these people originated from the Field of Doors, having literally stepped through time from Midgard's ancient past with an inexorable urge to head directly west toward the sea. So far, these time-displaced refugees seem of common stock—scribes, millers, and the like—but since they seem to be fleeing from some vague threat, their new hosts carry a growing concern that other, more powerful beings may also be stepping through from the past, and Maillon seek the adventurous to travel to the Field of Doors and investigate closing whatever portals may be letting them through. Citizens who know of their presence engage in salty debates about whether or not the travelers should be sent back through to their own time and possible doom, given that they seem to originate from a period just prior to the Isonade's destruction of Ankeshel, or whether their knowledge should be utilized to decipher some of the long-standing mysteries of vril technology. For now, the matter is kept quiet, but it is only a matter of time before the strange guests are discovered by those from the outside, seeking to exploit whatever knowledge they might have carried from the past.

The Bemmean Peninsula & Beyond

North of Maillon, perched at the tip of the peninsula that bears its name, is mighty Bemmea. The city continues as it always has, the spires awash in magical energy, unchallenged even by the increasingly raging tide around it. But the citizens there feel something is changing. And while few know of the true threat, the properly trained and attuned know that something far out at sea is tugging at the ley lines anchored by the city's sigil-shaped streets, threatening to wrench it free from the control and authority of the Ninemage Council. Though the source of the threat remains unverified, the council is torn on three prevailing theories and suspects that it is either a powerful vril artifact uncovered and reactivated by unscrupulous Cassadegan archeologists; a starving, power-hungry divine force that has clawed its way back into this reality from the edge of the world; or even stirrings of the Isonade itself. Informed wizards in the community have temporarily set aside their personal disputes and cooperated on the construction of a magical craft for quickly traversing the Western Sea to investigate the source of the threat and seek experienced adventurers to protect an expedition whose purpose might be the very preservation of the mages' way of life.

Southeast of Bemmea, toward Cassadega and looming over the coastal road between Smolderheim and Cuculla, stands ancient and lonely Castle Vaelmar. Once an important sanctuary for survivors of the Great Mage Wars, the castle was slowly abandoned several centuries ago when claims of hauntings began to take hold, causing travelers to brave the night and quicken their steps to make their way toward the towns flanking the castle instead. While few scholars have given the stronghold's reputation much attention, those that have now maintain that there may have been powerfully cursed wizards in hiding among the refugees whose very presence within the walls had some malign influence on the structure. But the stronghold is sturdy and intact, and there are those

who would like to see the castle restored to viability. Initial reports state that one's view of the castle depends on the level of light used in one's explorations and that the dimmer the light the further back in time one experiences their surroundings, lending credence to the reports of its hauntings. Bright light reveals the castle in its present-day abandonment, and the latest reports state that dim light seems to reveal a time when refugees flooded the castle nearly 500 years ago, and those who walk in darkness report witnessing scenes from the castle's earliest beginnings some thousand years ago. What riddle this might pose between these seemingly interconnected timelines may solve the mystery of the castle's dire reputation and ultimately lead to its reclamation by those with the power or prestige to dismiss these strange temporal convergences.

On the Northern terminus of the magocracy's border lies disheveled Cassadega, its chaos of enterprise and activity promising fortune and fame for those who dare explore the ruins of drowned Ankeshel. The vril boomtown is abuzz over the announcement of the ongoing excavation of a newly discovered spiraling branch of the ancient city uncovered by the churning tides in what is now the outermost ring of the destroyed city. Early reports by the team responsible for the find speculated it would have been a temple district or religious center, but the authorities have since dismissed the find as nothing more than a mundane artisan's quarter. Some claim to have witnessed what lies half-uncovered beneath the waves for themselves and confirm the original findings of an important holy domain that seemed defaced in ancient times, speculating what those responsible may be trying to hide. What is known for sure is that something stirs in the streets, both above the waves and below, and reports indicate the reemergence of two strange, ancient sects comprised of archeologists and merfolk who have fallen sway to this mysterious influence from the past. Most disturbingly, a host of minor and seemingly unrelated vril artifacts have reportedly gone missing from shops and private collections, and there is an increasing call for courageous investigators to take the plunge into the depths and investigate the heavily guarded underwater temples. Another adventure along the ever shifting and dangerous coast of the Western Wastes.

Inspired by the gibbering mouthers that frequently emerge from the Western Wastes, this spell curses the target with an inane babbling that drives it, and others who hear it, temporarily mad.

INFECTIOUS GIBBERING

4th-level enchantment

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 30 feet

Components: V, S, M (a mummified bird's tongue)

Duration: Concentration, up to 1 minute

This spell causes the target to break into a fit of uncontrollable and infectious gibbering. The target must succeed on a Wisdom saving throw or gain disadvantage on attack rolls and ability checks.

In addition, any creatures within 10 feet of the original target that hear the gibbering must make a Wisdom saving throw. On a failed save, a creature becomes affected by the spell for the remaining duration, gaining disadvantage on attack rolls and ability checks.

Affected targets can make another Wisdom saving throw at the end of their turns. On a success, the effect ends for that creature.

Creatures with an Intelligence score of 4 or less aren't affected by this spell.

10 MAGNIFICENT SULTANS OF THE MHAROTI EMPIRE

by Wolfgang Baur

For all of its almost 350 years, the Mharoti Empire has been home to tremendously rapacious lords. All its sultans and morza have pursued a policy of war, plunder, and expansion—but not all have been equally effective. Leading the war and marshalling the empire's resources is the work of the sultan or sultana, the human leader who unites, governs, and leads the empire's many factions—work that the dragons don't trust other dragons to do.

Indeed, one of the sultan's most disagreeable tasks is that of ruling on disputes between the scaly lords, a task almost certain to make an enemy. Should we pity the sultan? No, indeed, but learn now the tales of ten of the most famous of these rulers and some of their strange magic and ever-glorious deeds.

Hetman Xandros (0–41 MDA)

The first sultan was not called a sultan at all but was styled as the chamberlain and hetman to Mharot himself, a sort of glorified servant and factotum. This role explains much of the later development of the title and duties of the sultan. For Hetman Xandros, over the years his word grew increasingly strict and his duties grew more and more martial as Mharot spent time counting treasures, accepting fealty, and raising thousands and tens of thousands of kobaldi and dragonborn troops to fight for the nascent empire's raids out of the hills and into the rich human lands of Parthia, the islands of Marea, the Free City of Pharos, and other neighboring territories. As he grew too old and feeble to lead soldiers on long marches out of the Khalpostan hills, Xandros took on new duties as a leader of the Mharoti faith, founding the first large temple of Baal and granting permission for eastern missionaries of Azuran to speak to the scaly folk.

At the end of his life, Xandros was posthumously given the title of "First Sultan of the Mharoti," and his burial site in Khalpostan is still a site of pilgrimage and veneration. Called the Tomb of the First Servant, it is a place that Mharot himself visits about once a decade. Its priests make much of their role and history.

Sultan Trebezid, the Shadow of the Dragon (58–79 MDA)

Said to be dragon-blooded and extremely well versed in prophetic arts and arcane divinations, Sultan Trebezid served as Mharot's first recipient of dreams and indeed the system of "dream commands" originates with Sultan Trebezid. A very private man, he left no heirs, and much of his work was carried out in secret, bribing lesser lords to pledge fealty to Mharot and its legions (perhaps under magical compulsion—the records are unclear). Certainly the first records of the service of ogres and giants in the armies of the empire date from his time. He also codified much dragon magic, including many of its unique elemental and battle spells (see *Midgard Heroes Handbook* or *Deep Magic: Dragon Magic*) and established the first college of war to train officers, wands, and siege engineers.

In addition to these contributions to the empire's traditions, Sultan Trebezid is fondly remembered for personally leading the assault on the Free City of Pharos, the empire's great naval rival on the Ruby Sea. The songs and tales of his courage are many, though some always take a more skeptical view; the assault did provide a victory and an enormous number of human slaves, but the ensuring city-wide fire left the conquest rather ashen. Plunder was slim, and what little taken funded an attempt to rebuild the harbor. Pharos never recovered and remains a minor village to this day.

Sultan Omayed the Munificent (69–113 MDA)

Generous to a fault, Sultan Omayed kept his generals and nobles close to him, even as rebellion spread in distant provinces and assassins made attempts against his life closer to home. The morza loved him because he excelled at extracting taxes from the poor and the artisans, but the jambuka hated him, for he preached always of a "golden blood" form of the Mharoti polity, speaking frequently of exterminating the hairy folk that "hold the empire back."

In practice, rebellions were brutally suppressed by his loyal heavy troops, and the kobaldi enjoyed lording it over terrified ghettos of humans, gnolls, and dwarves. In the end, Omayed died at the ripe age of 75 on the golden silk sheets of his sultan's bed and surrounded by generals who had all sworn to defend him—and grown rich doing it.

Sultana Petek Rayhana the Golden (114–127 MDA)

After Omayed's heavy taxation and constant purges, it seems that the Blessing of Mharot took a different direction. Petek Rayhana was a woman raised in Perunalia who came to Harkesh as an adult and quickly became a wealthy, powerful leader of artisans and scholars and with many friends in the priesthood. Her salons and her tireless work on behalf of the poor and the starving restored peace and harmony between scaly folk and hairy folk—until she was appointed sultana at Omayed's death.

The title seems to have swiftly given her a sense of authority and control, and she moved quickly to advance Mharoti interests against the minotaurs, Nurians, Mareans, and Ishadians. Indeed, she led what is still called the Dragonfire Crusade against the Nurians, a bold stroke that conquered and held the Nurian city of Avaris for a season; her famous star dagger is said to have been looted from a Nurian god-queen's tomb. Her conquest of Achillon and the Marea was more lasting than the occupation of Avaris, and that province remembers her to this day. Sultana Petek died rather young in childbirth with her fifth child, though some believe she was assassinated by zealous cultists of Azuran offended by her refusal to allow gambling among the palace troops.

Sultana Gülnur Peteka, the Silent Rose (182–201 MDA)

The Sultana Gülnur spent time consolidating the conquests of her predecessors, building roads and fortifications, planning new thrusts against Ishadia and restoring the fleet to chase down Marean pirates. She is best remembered, however, not for aqueducts, castles, and roads, but for her ruling in the matter of the great undead morza Ibbalan and the general of the 4th Legion, Regladoross the Night Flyer. In that dispute, Ibbalan claimed a larger share of the treasure from the conquest of the harbor city of Prezhan (taken from the Nurians) than was strictly owing, simply as the morza nearest to the new land and its presumptive new liege lord. Regladoross had lost a brother in battle and fought extremely bloody actions against Red Portal mages, theurges of Thoth-Hermes, and a group of sun priests who slew Mharoti edjet and timarli with silent rains of radiant light, burning armor and puncturing helms and leaving roughly half the 4th Legion dead in the streets of Prezhan.

By Mharoti law, Ibbalan could claim a quarter of the spoils, but he took nearer a third. Kobaldi and other smallfolk were shocked when he dared to this corruption of law. However, quoting the Law of Baal and the dream-words of Mharot ("Fair plunder makes a stronger empire"), the sultana sided with the general and restored the plunder from Ibbalan to the legion's survivors. The armies and the other morza all sided with the sultana's ruling, and for the first time, Mharoti law was seen to apply to even the strongest and most powerful dragons. The sultana commissioned an enormous monument to the dead from her own funds.

Lest it be thought that all the wrath of dragons was turned aside, let it be noted that young, charismatic Regladoross died of a mysterious scale rot some years later; no connection to Ibbalan was ever proven. Gülnur immortalized him on the Prezhan monument as "Conqueror of the Harbor, Lord of Legions, Paragon of Just Plunder."

Sultan Omayed the Younger (279–288 MDA)

A great and deeply devout follower of Khespotan, Sultan Omayed, it was said, would not leave bed without consulting his fortune. The priests of the earth god had great influence in his reign, and the dragon Rüzgar was the first and only one of its kind to be granted a province of its own during Sultan Omayed's rule. It was a time of great prophecies, and the writing of several famous volumes of prophecy, poetry, and law all date to this period. Four great monastic schools and six large colleges teaching mining, arcana, and theology were all established in this short period.

In the end, however, Sultan Omayed failed to provide sufficient new wealth to feed the temples of Baal and to expand the treasuries of Mharot, Ibbalan, and Rüzgar (among others), and Omayed was denounced as having lost the "mandate of Mharot" by dozens of prophets of Khespotan, all on the same day throughout the empire. The Sultan died in his sleep four days later, leading to a tumultuous Years without a Sultan (288–303) when the morza all attempted to rule independently. This almost led to civil war and certainly did lead to the empire's contraction until the morza agreed to restore a (very weak) sultan to make decisions for the empire as a whole.

CLAWED SCEPTER

Unique wondrous item

Shaped like a set of talons holding a sun sphere, the Clawed Scepter is made of gold and set with pearls and rubies in a rather garish, bold style. The holder of the scepter is immune to magical fear, cold, and fire, and gains the ability to make all Charisma (Persuade) ability checks with advantage.

THE STAR DAGGER

Rare weapon

Of Nurian make and star-forged steel and adamant, the star dagger is a beautiful *+3 dagger* that glows with a cold, actinic light. All invisible creatures within 60 feet of the unsheathed blade lose their invisibility at once and are covered in *faerie fire*. More than one assassin has been foiled by the *Star Dagger's* clear light.

Sultan Zelim the Wastrel (304–308 MDA)

At first, Zelim was an odd choice for a sultan. His prior life had been as a court jeweler, providing gemstones for the dragonkin, taking commissions for necklaces and signet rings, and generally understanding the finances of plunder and conquest. However, his rule began very auspiciously because at the very least it ended the public feuding of the Years without a Sultan. Caravans within the empire were no longer plundered, garrisons were sent to the borders, and legions marched against external foes.

And for a time, it seemed that Sultan Zelim had found a way to expand the power of the empire without all the expense of armies. He brought the blood mages of Kaa'nesh to his court, and they explained things of a few of the dark arts and the joys of Malena, the Red Goddess, and his armies found it easy to conquer towns and villages struck down by plagues and mysterious fevers. He commissioned a Clawed Scepter to show his excellent ability to generate streams of gold and jewels for the lords of the empire.

This worked well for a decade as Zelim grew ever more withdrawn, fat, and arrogant, thinking himself the lord of the Mharoti, rather than the lord executor and defender of the faith. In an incautious moment, he spoke of the "strength of human will" and the "power of the sultan over his enemies" and "the scepter that denotes my perfect rule of the land," phrases that his dragonborn and kobaldi advisors quickly reported to other scaled nobles as indicative of great pride and a confusion over whose will truly ruled the dragon lands. His doom was sealed.

Unrest among both the fire priesthood and the orders of Azuran, and doom-ridden prophecies from Khespotan's caverns, made it clear that Zelim's reign could not last. The priests denounced him daily from the temples as his losses grew, and one fine morning, Harkesh woke up to find that a rather junior general, Makbule Khezmir, had been given the Blessing of Mharot and the Clawed Scepter of government. Since then, few have spoken of Zelim the Wastrel, except to spit and curse his foolishness. The Clawed Scepter that Zelim commissioned is one of the few remaining signs of his reign.

Sultan Makbule Khezmir the Wise (309–324 MDA)

With military experience and a deep sense of how corruption and arrogance can lead a ruler astray, Sultan Makbule Khezmir is certainly among the most humble and honest to hold the title. His rule is fondly remembered as the time of conquests against Khandiria, a great victory in Ishadia, even explorations down the Corsair Coast and steady progress in subduing Marea & the Islands, which is to say, finally rooting out several major pirate nests that had held on for a hundred years. He built roads, regulated weights and measures (one common weight is still called the Khezmir pint in his honor), and strove to improve the lot of all the Mharoti people. For this reason, he is rarely disparaged, and his is often referred to as the "Good Old Sultan."

Sultana Casmara Azrabahir (325–342 MDA)

The Sultan Khezmir's granddaughter and a woman of strong will and endless plans, the sultana ruled for many years in prosperity. Then the combined misfortunes of the naval defeat of Seggotan's Tears and the defeat by the Khandirians at the battle of Wheeling Angels led to the destruction of enough dragonkin that rumors, riots, and anger against the sultana became a problem. Her spies were able to warn her of the coming coup, and she escaped in time, but her fall led to the rise of a much crueler and more rapacious ruler, the Dread Sultan Ozmir.

Dread Sultan Ozmir Al Stragul (342–347 MDA)

The first dragonborn to ascend to the position of sultan, Ozmir is a former general and acts like it. Every problem is to be solved by the application of just a little more force, and rampant bribery and corruption flourish among his court, for he believes in spoils and plunder as the right of all dragonfolk. While the merchants complain at the taxes he levies to fund the army (needed after the shameful neglects of the sultana, claims the new lord), the kobaldi delight in the new farmlands of Rumela and the new opportunities to enslave humans and gnolls and other hairy folk.

The empire has seen no great victories under the new sultan, but it has suffered no losses, and the mustering of troops and construction of fleets continues at a furious pace. Sultan Ozmir intends to leave a mark on the world, clawed loose with fire and cunning. The only question for his neighbors is which direction he will cast his steely eye.

Summary

The sultans have ruled sometimes wisely and sometimes foolishly, have been corrupted and have applied the rod of justice to the followers of dark paths and wicked dealings. Like any government, the Mharoti Empire is prone to fits and starts, errors and injustices, just as often as it brings true justice, rich plunder, and full bellies to its people. Its sultans and sultanas, though, are much loved among the hairy folk and scaled folk alike, and it may be that their ability to weave and compromise among the dragon lords is the mortar that has held the whole enormous nation together for so many centuries. Long live the sultan!

INTO THE DRAGON EMPIRE: MAREA AND THE ISLANDS

by Chris Harris

The Mharoti Empire's Province of Marea and the Islands, also known as the "Province of Fallen Temples," became part of the empire over a century ago. With the conquest of neighboring Illyria, many thought the old worries concerning Marea's embarrassing "difficulties" with its largely non-scaled population and their supplanted faiths would have faded away, bringing greater stability to the region. On the island of Eraklion, at least, the prediction proved to be an erroneous one.

Eraklion

Eraklion, once a sleepy fishing village atop the western seaside cliffs of a small island, teeters on the knife's edge of imperial disfavor. The priesthood of Nethus on the island and the surrounding region all but disappeared over the last century, first due to conquest by the Mharoti Empire which expelled the Nethusites from their temples and rededicated the holy places to their own sea god, Segottan. Then decades later, their status suffered further degradation in the years of the Nethus's captivity by Kammae Straboli. With the freeing of their god, Nethus's remaining priests and priestesses experienced a renewed vigor and directed their zeal at those who drove them from their temples. They now play a deadly cat-and-mouse game with the Dragon Empire, striking at draconic rule and then disappearing with the aid of sea creatures who share their devotion.

Eraklion now finds itself the nexus of the Nethusite priesthood's covert efforts by virtue of its seaside location and the old priest who leads the rebellion from hiding in a cave system among the coastal cliffs nearby. The ancient temple of Nethus, reluctantly restored by the Mharoti, keeps itself insulated from these activities and publicly denounces the "heretical" deeds of their hidden brethren. However, this disavowal is largely a charade to protect both the temple and its adherents from reprisal.

The relative light touch of the morza who rules the region, the silver dragon Yiraz Azah, played into their hands at the outset of the insurgency, but recent days have seen the morza's servants patrolling the area, and her wounded pride at the loss of an imperial legion to Triolan naval power acts as a goad to her efforts.

Rewards have been posted for the insurgent priesthood, but thus far, none have come forward to claim any, and the Nethusites themselves keep all but a few residents in the dark about their activities. Several radical devotees of Nethus have been burned alive near the steps of the temple, but the practice is unlikely to be repeated since it only served to intensify the conflict and galvanize some of the populace in their devotion. Nevertheless, some locals resent the Nethusites over the increased imperial scrutiny, particularly among the seafaring smugglers who use the village as a home port.

ADVENTURE HOOKS IN ERAKLION

Find adventure in distant Eraklion:

- Hunt a renegade priest of Nethus hiding either in the cliffside caverns along the coast or beneath the waves below.
- Free a captured Nethusite accused of sedition and sacrilege.
- Pose as part of a smuggler's crew in order to take command of the ship and sail its valuable cargo to Kyprion.
- Hunt a ferocious sea serpent who preys on local fishing boats.

While some areas in the province grow restive, others carry on as they have done for a century, all the while remaining shrouded in secrecy. One such place, the mountaintop city called Mistras-Marea holds secrets even from the dragons it continues to serve faithfully.

Mistras-Marea

The steep mountain road which winds upward to the walled city of Mistras-Marea begins its climb at a fork in the road near a village of mostly human farmers governed by a small fort garrisoned by dragonkin officers and kobold troops. Almost all of the traffic up the mountain consists of kobolds driving cattle to spare their dragonkin superiors the indignity. No non-scaled creatures ever ascend unless bound as captives and escorted by soldiers from the garrison. What comes down the mountain does so with less regularity due to restrictions on trade. No silk goods leave the Mistras-Marea except in the hands of scaled imperial citizens of akinji rank or higher or those bearing a writ from a creature of equal prestige. Provided those qualifications are met, dragonkin or other scaled citizens may purchase the finest silk in quantities of nearly any size; spools as large as a horse sometimes make their way in wagons down the mountain road.

Mistras-Marea's sole trade commodity is silk of the finest quality. Great spools of silk thread and rope, silk clothing, and other items, such as barding of any size, can be purchased at the barbican from the human thralls there or constructed to order while the client waits in the small inn just down the road.

The weavers of the city also produce a steady supply of quilted silk for use in padding for armor, which provides additional protection against arrows (possessing resistance to piercing damage from nonmagical weapons). Expensive even for Mharoti of some standing, such pieces are most often given as rewards by the ruling classes of the empire to faithful servants, primarily as an inner layer to a hauberk or suit of scale mail.

Steady trade notwithstanding, few who come to trade go any further than the barbican, supposedly in the interest of protecting well-kept trade secrets. The interior of the city remains a mystery to all but the morza who governs the province and a few others.

The city's size is deceptive. Much of the surface area within the walls skirts around the edges of massive caverns that descend deep into the mountain. Indeed, these caverns and their occupants give the city its reason for existence. Thick, rope-like webs crisscross much of the caves' interiors for at least 100 feet below the surface, and their inner walls bear large, pockmarked holes. Within the holes, the web's spinners, all specimens of a fecund breed of angler worm (see *Tome of Beasts*) wait for cattle to be dropped into their lines.

Known to only a few of the ruling morza of the Empire, Mistras-Marea operates entirely under the guidance of a cartel of Denizens of Leng (see *Tome of Beasts*). Some of the humanoid prisoners brought to the city spend the rest of their lives as weavers of silk, leading hard, frightening lives of forced labor at the hands of monsters. Those captives not chosen for the work of weavers vanish down the enormous caverns. The weak and infirm become food for the angler worms, but the majority march in chains through a portal leading to the Plateau of Leng and an unknown fate.

The vast wealth that has made its way up the mountain for many years is thought to sit buried in chambers deep in caves, far below the webs of the worms. What dangers might await beneath the webs, none can say, but for all the worms' size, on occasion they are found half-eaten, slowly spinning in their own webbing. Whatever creatures feed on them do so infrequently, however, and have yet to come all the way to the surface.

Here are a few of the goods available to those with the privilege or luck to attain them.

TREASURES FROM MISTRAS-MAREA

Very fine goods indeed come from Marean silk.

Marean Silk Cloak

These full, hooded cloaks exist in a wide variety of vivid colors, though most serve as rewards for faithful service, reflecting the scales of the giver. Marean silk cloaks grants the wearer resistance to piercing damage from nonmagical weapons.
Cost: 120 gp; **Weight**: 3 lb.

Marean Silk Rope

Marean silk rope comes in a 50-foot coil, has 4 hit points, and can be burst or detached with a DC 20 Strength check.
Cost: 75 gp; **Weight**: 4 lb.

Marean Net

A Marean silk net functions as a mundane net but weighs less, has greater range, and the following differences:

- A Marean net requires a DC 14 Strength check to free oneself or another from it.
- Inflicting 12 slashing damage to the net (AC 12) destroys the net and frees a creature trapped within, but an attack made to free a creature which misses by 5 or more results in the weapon becoming snared in the net's sticky strands, requiring a DC 12 Strength check to free it.

Marean Whip

The silk of angler worms is braided together with leather to lend these whips an edge when used against unruly thralls. An attack with a Marean whip that succeeds against a Medium or smaller creature by 5 or more restrains the target.

Silk-Backed Coin Mail

Made of silver coins from conquered Illyria, backed by a layer of quilted red silk spun by the monstrous angler worms of Mistras-Marea, only a few dozen of these hauberks were made and awarded to dragonkin who acquitted themselves with conspicuous valor in the campaign that

WEAPON	COST	DAMAGE	WEIGHT	PROPERTIES
Marean Silk Net	60 gp	—	2 lb.	Special, Thrown (range 10/20)
Marean Whip	50 gp	1d4 slashing	3 lb.	Special, Finesse, Reach

MEDIUM ARMOR	COST	ARMOR CLASS (AC)	STRENGTH	STEALTH	WEIGHT
Silk-Backed Coin Mail	—	15 + Dex modifier (max 1)	—	Disadvantage	50 lb.

conquered that land. The armor grants the wearer resistance to piercing damage from nonmagical weapons. Silk-backed coin mail grants the wearer +2 status when dealing with any citizen of the Mharoti Empire, and −2 status when dealing with exiled Illyrians or Triolans.

The key to the silk harvesting comes from the experimentation the denizens of Leng inflicted on some of their human captives. The end result is an ideal instrument for the purpose, though hideous to behold.

Marean Weaver

This gruesome many-legged creature has the body of an enormous centipede, topped by a humanoid torso covered in a chitinous exoskeleton. The mouth of its armored head consists of multiple sets of small mandibles, and its multifaceted eyes bulge out of human-like sockets. Two long, segmented arms droop from its shoulders, and a third grown from between its shoulders hangs over its head like a scorpion's tail.

Once Were Human. These hideous creatures were once human, but through arcane means, the denizens of Leng have transformed them beyond recognition. The metamorphosis did not leave their minds intact, and they appear quite dull when not performing one of the tasks for which they were made. Marean weavers may retain some shred of memory of their former lives, but their every waking moment is now filled with one task or another, all requiring what little concentration they can muster.

Designed for Several Purposes. Weavers exist for two purposes: harvesting the silk webs of angler worms by holding off the worms without killing them to allow others to do the harvesting and weaving the silk into various items. Their altered minds make them immune to the worms' ability to lure prey, and their chitinous skin grants them some defense against the acid of the worms' bites. Everything about them that does not aid those tasks has been removed if at all possible by the denizens of Leng.

Formidable in Numbers. The weaver's three arms were designed primarily to hold off an angler worm's attack by stopping its charge and holding its gaping maw open with the aid of another weaver while others harvest nearby silk web lines. Accordingly, they are rarely seen in numbers less than three.

MAREAN WEAVER

Large monstrosity, neutral

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)

Hit Points 52 (7d10 + 14)

Speed 30 ft., climb 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	7 (−2)	12 (+1)	5 (−3)

Skills Acrobatics +4, Athletics +3, Perception +3

Saving Throws Dex +4, Con +4

Damage Resistances acid

Condition Immunities charmed

Senses darkvision 60 ft.; passive Perception 13

Languages understands Trade Tongue but cannot speak

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Spider Climb. The weaver can climb difficult surfaces, including upside down on ceilings, without needing to make an ability check.

Web Sense. While in contact with a web, the weaver knows the exact location of any other creature in contact with the same web.

Web Walker. The weaver ignores movement restrictions caused by webbing.

Actions

Multiattack. The marean weaver makes three claw attacks.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +4 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (2d4 + 2) slashing damage. If two or more claw attacks hit the same target, the target is grappled (escape DC 13) if it is a Large or smaller creature and the weaver doesn't have another creatures grappled. Two weavers working in tandem can grapple a Huge creature.

UNDER THE GULLET

by Peter von Bleichert

Zobeck's Undercity is vast and varied and ranges from natural, water-carved passages to purposeful conduits—such as infrastructural ones that move water, wares, and waste—as well as nefarious types, like the infamous Cartways. Collectively known as the "Sewers," these different passages comingle and intersect beneath all parts of Zobeck, including the Dock District.

Zobeck's Dock District is at the eastern edge of the free city, bounded to the north and west by the Citadel and its District, the Argent River to the east, and the College District lies south. Known as the Gullet, Zobeck's Dock District is the heart of Zobeck's commerce. Hard folk—dwarves, gearforged, humans, and kobolds, among others—work the Gullet's docks.

These folks work hard, drink hard, and fight hard. Goods arrive at the Gullet's wharves by barge, dugout, raft, and other shallow-draft riverboats. Then dockers (stevedores) get to work. Using clockwork cranes and conveyors, the dockers unload vessels, break down loads, and warehouse or transfer cargo to other river boats or to cart and mule trains that traverse the Great Northern Road and other land paths that cross within Zobeck's limits and just outside its walls and gates.

Under the Docks

The area west of the River Argent, where the Gullet now stands, was an ancient flood plain. This land was once similar to the tilled pastureland that lies to the river's east. As Zobeck flourished and grew, and trade increased at the riverfront, the city built levees, though the temperamental river frequently topped the earthen works. Zobeck had to tame the sprawling Argent, so a river wall (or groyne) was constructed.

Comprised of crushed rock and clay sandwiched between wooden piles and horizontal planks, the groyne created an embarcadero that allowed vessels to dock and moor regardless of the Argent's mood. The construct stretched along the length of the river's west bank from the Greymark Warehouse to the Blackened Fish Tavern, and wrapped the small island—called the Kobold's Tail, or simply the Tail—that lies within the two forks of the Argent. Behind the groyne, the land was filled and raised, keeping valuable buildings and their contents well above the Argent's flood stage.

During this expensive and extensive work, old canals were covered or filled, and structures that once stood on spindly pilings were supported and, in some cases, stone-lined basements got installed beneath them. Successive mayors had the foresight to put in sewer works, including catch basins, junctions, pipework, and sump pits. Effluent from knacker yards, privies, and tanneries that once flowed through street gutters now went below ground, all the way to Puffing Bridge.

Discharged from outlets beneath the span, the pestilential pong flows into the Argent, turning the river's greenish water brown. Caught by the current, the filth is carried downstream and toward the Ruby Sea, though not before offending many a Zobeckian nose. These subterranean works are the domain within which many of Zobeck's roughest characters operate.

Inside the passages beneath the Gullet, among carrion and rot, shenanigans and shady deals transpire. To engage in such transactions, a few moments under street level is required, but, more often than not, an extended stay: demanded.

Once folks venture beneath the Gullet, they change forever: they are said to be "Swallowed." To go Under-Gullet, one may be seeking back entrances to the Cartways or the Smuggler's Market or searching for the fabled Black Chamber to worship or, more likely, pillage its treasures. Most, though, are temporarily underground to lay low and escape enforcers, nervously watching through sewer grates as patrols pass, waiting for the unwelcome attention to wane. Others, however, check-in for an extended stay, disappearing into the wet darkness, joining the slithering things that call the Under-Gullet home.

Regardless of the time spent there, life soon turns from natural cycles (like sunrise and sunset) to an unnatural lineal punctuated only by smallish events, such as, "When I ate that rat," or "When that shadow appeared and shoved a blade in my face, demanding recompense for life spared." Despite the length of time spent Under-Gullet, one is certain to encounter the Swallowed.

The Swallowed

All Undercity dwellers are prone to thievery and brandish daggers or the like if confronted. The Swallowed are likely to know the location of concealed and secret doors and passages too and make use of them to escape, outflank, or steal. All such folk are generally soiled, offending most senses, especially the olfactory, and tend toward, though are not limited to, assassin and thief archetypes of the rogue class. Otherwise, the Swallowed generally engage in one or more of the following roles:

GRUBBERS

Grubbers tend to congregate around drains, sewer grates, and sump pits where they scavenge waste materials such as bone, rags, or errant coins. Grubbers are territorial and defend their patch of Undercity. They recognize a hierarchy, however, and the Bone Grubber—the powerful and feared Gommage d'Os—lays claim to any subterranean area he so wishes.

When foraging does not produce, grubbers lurk near street level and reach out with a grubber claw—a pole topped with a sharpened hook that can snag or cut—and empty or steal pouches or purses from passersby. To accomplish such larceny, there are primitive underground hides with hatches concealed at street-level by cobblestones or false puddles. Grubbers use these ambuscades to escape Black Lock assistants, Vigilant Blades, watchmen, or other freelance guardsmen and investigators and when grubbers and their ilk get hired to complete deadly deeds these hides facilitate stealthy dispatch of targets with poison weapons like darts, daggers, needles, and other hide-penetrating missiles.

MUDLARKS

The Gullet's groyne defines the river's course within the district, and the dry-docks and quays it sports are prevalent on the city's map. Within the Gullet and along the river, there are small beaches and rock piles. These places are the domain of the mudlarks.

Mudlarks emerge from pipes, tunnels, and water inlets to scour the thick, black muddy riverbank. They poke the soggy suck-muck of the shore to find items for barter or sale, or

they strip vessels of their brass, bronze, and copper fittings, reselling them to members of the Bargeman's Fellowship or melting them down into valuable ingots. Such activity can occur at any time and regardless of the Argent's condition, though it occurs most often during moonless nights and when the river is low. On days the river is not in a giving mood, mudlarks pilfer unattended cargo, often with the cooperation of the dockers, whom ask for a kickback.

TOSHERS

Toshers are both scavengers and hunters. Roaming the Under-Gullet, they take what they may and do not hesitate to kill when necessary. Feeding off rats and, in some cases, the flesh of their own kind (both human and kobold toshers have been known to engage in cannibalism), most toshers are thought to be unbalanced, with a few downright insane. The Undercity's damp dark may drive minds this direction, or it could be the style of life beneath ground that takes them there. Regardless, no one wants to run into these Swallowed as toshers do not negotiate or reason. When toshers are encountered… someone is going to die.

The Gullet's Portals

Besides known and guarded entrances to the Cartways, there are several rumored entrances to the rest of the Under-Gullet, such as in the buildings of the Bargeman's Fellowship or the Blackened Fish Tavern as well as beneath Puffing Bridge. Some even speak of a doorway in the Altar of Lorelei. Regardless, only a few of Zobeck's citizens know their true locations, and fewer still know the location of them all. Often, after an interloper finds a doorway, an accident occurs with the finder's fate delivered by trap or other dark method.

The Gullet's Reservoirs

The River Argent is part of Midgard's water cycle. Snow falls in the mountains, melts in the warmer seasons, and runs toward Midgard's seas. However, the gods do not always provide, and snowfall becomes a rarity. Crops and beasts die. Towns and cities grow thirsty. As such, Zobeck has come to store that precious resource that is water. Initially, during early droughts, the city built subterranean beehive-shaped cisterns. Later, as Zobeck grew and droughts became prolonged—sometimes lasting decades—the city installed larger reservoirs: vast vaulted underground spaces. Many such caches exist beneath the Gullet, though most of these reservoirs are abandoned or partially collapsed. With maps incomplete and often lost, these structures get forgotten. As other Undercity works proceed, the elaborate structures are breached and adapted to other purposes or become inhabited by unmentionable creatures and folk.

Conclusion

The Gullet's boarding houses, boardwalks, bordellos, chandler shops, rickety docks, half-collapsed warehouses and half-timbered houses, pungent flophouses, and smoke-filled taverns sit atop another world. This world is one of dark brick-lined or natural water-carved tunnels, a world of underground spaces that groan and moan under the weight of what lies above, though do their job and persevere, preserving and perpetuating a world beneath that should not otherwise exist. A pale reflection of that which is above ground, this place is, nonetheless, as much a part of the fabric of Zobeck as the city's sun-kissed segments. It is the dark reflection, the cloudy mirror image, of Zobeck.

AMID THE LEAVES OF YGGDRASIL

by Richard Green

***Author's Note**: Parts of this article are taken from the infamous Nine Chthonic Papyri of Heknusret the Temerarious, disgraced former member of the Honorable Society of Portal Wizards. Heknusret traveled to many different times, places, and worlds through the Red Portals and meticulously recorded what he found there.*

My visit to Yggdrasil, the World Ash, came about by sheer happenstance. I had ventured into the Crescent Desert to visit the ruined donjon of Shabhenti Djalit, self-styled "Master of Worlds," to investigate rumors of a long-forgotten Red Portal. Unfortunately, the fortress had fallen into the hands of diabolical slavers (see *Warlock Lair #14: The Infernal Salt Pits*), and I was forced to abort my expedition. While relaxing at the lush Mentayni Oasis, which lies at the junction of the Howler's Road and a much weaker ley line known as the Path of Salt, my scholarly curiosity was piqued by a huge date palm, clearly over a hundred years old. Sure enough, divination magic revealed that the tree's great trunk held a Red Portal, accessible to anyone eating its fruit. Taking a bite from a juicy date, I stepped boldly forward into the trunk . . .

I found myself standing on the branch of an ash tree of indeterminate but truly vast size. Its thick bark was silvery-grey in color and rough to the touch while shimmering blue-green oval-shaped leaves grew from its many branches. The wide branch I was standing on stretched off into the distance before and behind me as far as my eyes could see.

As I pondered which way to go, I noticed a small squirrel-like creature with sleek reddish fur and a pair of tiny tusks had appeared—a **ratatosk** (see *Tome of Beasts*). The little fellow regarded me curiously and began chattering rapidly in the tongue of the angels, asking who I was, from whence I had come, and whether I had anything tasty to eat. The tiny celestial was named Orrin Bristletail. Delighted with the succulent dates I gave him, he would become my constant companion and guide as I wandered amid the leaves of Yggdrasil.

The World Ash

Ratatosks are insatiable gossips and love causing mischief by twisting the truth or sharing others' secrets, so what Orrin Bristletail revealed about Yggdrasil may not be entirely accurate. Nonetheless, much of what he told me was borne out by my own observations, so I am recording it here.

Yggdrasil, the World Ash, grew from a seed stolen from the gods Frey and Freya by Ratatosk, first of his kind, which he buried at the very center of the multiverse. The tree

grew so tall and so broad that its branches and roots reached into all of the Nine Worlds, including our world of Midgard; Asgard, home of the Northern Gods; the Summer Lands of Alfheim; and the Underworld ruled by Loki's daughter, the dark goddess Hel.

GETTING AROUND THE WORLD ASH

Navigating the twisting pathways along Yggdrasil's branches is far from easy, and I was glad to have Orrin as my guide, even if he did sometimes lead us *toward* trouble, rather than away from it . . .

The branches of Yggdrasil can be many miles in length, so reaching a particular destination usually takes several days on foot. Sometimes a quicker route may exist via a portal connecting two distant branches, but a traveler needs to know how to find it. Portals can appear as holes or simple wooden doors in the trunk or branch or as archways formed by entwined branches, and they are marked with the Eiwaz rune.

The vast network of paths is confusing enough to inexperienced planar travelers, but to make matters worse, it is constantly changing—new branches are discovered while old ones die and break. Only the ravenfolk and the ratatosk seem to be able to keep track of which branch or doorway currently leads where, though the elves and valkyries know the major routes to the Summer Lands, Valhalla, and the Storm Court. Even with a guide, it is possible to get turned around and become lost as the branches twist and bend in the winds that blow through the tree.

Different parts of the tree have their own local gravity, so sometimes a traveler needs to walk along the underside of the branch or stride vertically up the central trunk. Some branches are treacherous and slippery underfoot, requiring a successful DC 11 Dexterity (Acrobatics) check to navigate safely and avoid a painful fall of 2d4 damage per 10 ft. to another branch or, worse, through a portal leading to a dangerous plane. Others seep sticky resin that acts as difficult terrain, hindering movement.

INHABITANTS OF YGGDRASIL

Communities of ratatosk and ravenfolk are scattered throughout the tree. The ratatosk's larger cousins, the **ratatosk warlords** (see *Creature Codex*), build small watchtowers and sprawling tree cities among the branches, which provide protection and security for their smaller kin. These offer travelers a safe place to spend the night as long as the overly suspicious guards can be persuaded to grant admittance. The leaders of the ratatosk meet at the fabled Squirrel Court of Yggdrasil (see below) inside the great tree's trunk; its precise location is a closely guarded secret.

The ravenfolk live in rookeries—ramshackle collections of individual nests, shops, shrines, and meeting places connected by bridges, walkways, and ladders. All manner of materials is used in the construction of rookeries, harvested from the tree itself and scavenged from places across the planes.

Travelers in the World Ash must also be wary of the wilder creatures that make their homes in its canopy. **Giant eagles** live in the upper part of the tree, offspring of the great eagle that keeps watch from the crown (see "The Eyrie" below). Lower down, the branches are home to **giant elk**, which nibble on the tree's evergreen leaves, and **giant boar**, which root out the tasty fungi growing on the bark. Both are dangerous if their meals are disturbed. At the bottom of the tree, fell creatures gnaw on the roots, including the terrible serpent-wyrm Nidhogg and its spawn, while the goat-legged **kallikantzaros** (see *Creature Codex*) try to saw through the trunk. Pathways leading to other realms and worlds are often warded by powerful guardians.

MAGIC ON YGGDRASIL

Yggdrasil powers certain types of magic. While they are among the branches of the World Ash, druids and clerics of the Northern Gods operate as if they were 1 level higher for the purposes of determining spell slots per spell level and spellcasting proficiency bonus. Characters who have learned the Eiwaz

STAFF OF THE WORLD ASH

Staff, rare (requires attunement by a bard, druid, ranger, or wizard)

This staff of silvery-grey ash has been cut from a branch of Yggdrasil and is carved with the Eiwaz rune. Ravenfolk and other dwellers in the World Ash create these staffs to more easily travel its planar pathways.

You can perfectly recall any path you have traveled while holding this staff.

By striking the staff on the ground or against a branch of Yggdrasil as a bonus action, you can transform it into a *shillelagh* (as the spell) for 1 minute.

The staff has 10 charges and regains 1d6 + 4 expended charges daily at dawn. If you expend the last charge, roll a d20. On a 1, the staff loses its properties and becomes a nonmagical quarterstaff.

Spells. You can use an action to expend one or more of the staff's charges to cast one of the following spells: *create or destroy water* (1 charge), *freedom of movement* (4 charges), *locate Red Portal** (3 charges), *purify food and drink* (1 charge), *speak with plants* (3 charges).

*see *Midgard Worldbook*

rune (see *Heroes Handbook*) via the Rune Knowledge feat can access its rune powers as if they were 1 level higher.

Perilous Pathways

As we wandered the World Ash, Orrin Bristletail chattered away about the planar pathways formed by its roots and branches and where each led. He mentioned the "Nine Worlds" repeatedly but didn't name the same nine worlds twice. I came to the conclusion that this was merely a metaphor used by the ratatosk and the Northerners for what we in Nuria-Natal know to be the infinite planes of the multiverse.

PATHS TO MIDGARD

Where the branches of Yggdrasil reach into Midgard, they manifest as World Trees—great trees that act as nodes of divine power, revered by followers of the Northern Gods. As you travel along a pathway on Yggdrasil leading to one of the World Trees, its foliage and bark begin to take on the characteristics of its destination. So the bark of a branch leading to the enormous Winter Tree at Domovogrod (see *Midgard Worldbook*) gradually changes from silvery-grey to a rich, dark brown, and its blue-green oval leaves become the needles of a fir. This transformation helps reassure you that you are on the right path, though there is no clear border between Yggdrasil and Midgard. These pathways are often guarded. The route to the Winter Tree is plagued by a grove of tree-like **children of Yggdrasil** (see *Creature Codex*) while savage **lizardfolk** warriors haunt the path to the Black Cypress (see *Midgard Worldbook*), hunting for fresh heads to shrink and hang from its boughs.

One of Yggdrasil's three mighty roots stretches into Jotunheim, Land of Giants, in Midgard's Northlands where it is fed by the Well of Mimir. Here, Wotan cut out his eye and exchanged it for a drink from the well in order to gain great wisdom. The god's eye is said to rest in the well to this day, alongside the head of the giant Mimir who was decapitated by the Vanir but still watches over the well. PCs who can prove their worth to Tove Mimirsdottir, the **jotun giant** (see *Tome of Beasts*) guarding this mythical location, can gain the wisdom of the well—as long as they are prepared to surrender an eye to Mimir.

PLANAR PATHS

Yggdrasil's other giant roots both reach into different planes. The second root ends at the Well of Urd in Asgard where the Aesir gather to consult the Norns, the three wise old women who oversee the destinies of gods and men. The Norns mix water from the well with earth and use the mud to repair any cracks that appear in the giant root. A company of **valkyries** (see *Tome of Beasts*) keeps uninvited mortals away from the well.

The third root leads to the dark world of Niflheim where the spring known as Hvergelmir feeds all the rivers of the world. Here, on the Corpse Shore, the terrible serpent-wyrm Nidhogg feasts on the bodies of murderers, adulterers, and oath breakers and gnaws at the roots of the tree. The most wicked of these men are spared being eaten and are cursed by Nidhogg instead. They become the **tveirherjar** (see *Creature Codex*) and are sent to Valhalla to fight the valkyries and corrupt the **einherjar** (see *Tome of Beasts*). When Ragnarok is at hand, Nidhogg and his foul spawn will chew through the roots, and Yggdrasil will fall.

The World Ash's branches extend into a multitude of other planar locations. Klingedesh, Marketplace of the planes, can be accessed via the Thorn Gate, an archway of hundred-foot-tall ivory spines carved with arcane glyphs, which stands on a thick branch near the trunk. Sounds of eternal battle ring out on the well-trodden path to the halls of Valhalla. Brightly colored flowers and ivy grow on the leafy branch leading to the Summer Lands of the elves.

Planar flora (see *Creature Codex*) is commonly encountered where the boughs connect with celestial or fiendish realms. Thorned sulfurlords guard the pathways to Muspelheim, Land of Flame, while alabaster trees and ecstatic blooms grow on branches leading to the heavenly planes, and devil boughs and execrable shrubs can be found on highways to the Eleven Hells.

Hook. A loved one has died from illness while the PCs were away adventuring. Clerical magic has failed to bring him or her back from the dead, so the heroes must travel the undead-haunted road known as the Helveg to Gnipa Cave. If they can sneak past Garm, the monstrous blood-stained hound who guards the entrance to the Underworld, they can appeal to the goddess Hel to release their loved one's soul.

SPAWN OF NIDHOGG

Huge dragon, chaotic evil

Armor Class 18 (natural armor)

Hit Points 168 (16d12 + 64)

Speed 40 ft., climb 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	14 (+2)	18 (+4)	7 (−2)	13 (+1)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Dex +6, Con +8, Wis +5, Cha +4

Skills Perception +5, Stealth +6

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical weapons

Damage Immunities necrotic, poison

Condition Immunities poisoned

Senses blindsight 60 ft., darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 15

Languages Draconic, Northern Tongue

Challenge 10 (5,900 XP)

Stench of Death. Any creature that starts its turn within 10 feet of the spawn of Nidhogg must succeed on a DC 16 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned for 1 minute. On a successful saving throw, the creature is immune to the stench of any spawn of Nidhogg for one hour.

Legend's Scion (1/day). If the spawn of Nidhogg fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The spawn of Nidhogg makes three attacks—one with its bite and two with its claws.

Bite. Melee weapon attack: +9 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 16 (2d10 + 5) piercing damage and the target must make a DC 16 Constitution saving throw, taking 13 (3d8) necrotic damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one.

Claw. Melee weapon attack: +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 5) bludgeoning damage.

Breath of Decay (Recharge 5–6). The spawn of Nidhogg exhales foul black mist in a 30-foot cone. Each creature in the area must make a DC 16 Constitution saving throw, taking 52 (15d6) necrotic damage on a failed save, or half as much damage on a successful one. Plant creatures and magical plants make the saving throw with disadvantage and take maximum damage. Nonmagical plants that are not creatures simply wither and die.

Coiled around the roots of the tree is a sinuous wyrm with greenish-black scales, a pointed tail, and a crocodilian mouth filled with sharp teeth. The creature reeks of the rotting corpses it's been feeding on.

The spawn of Nidhogg the Serpent-Wyrm dwell in the lower reaches of Yggdrasil and in the dark realm of Niflheim. Like their loathsome father, the spawn feast on the bodies of the dead washed up on the Corpse Shore and gnaw at the roots of the World Ash, hoping to bring about the great tree's death and the end of the Nine Worlds. Their breath is so foul that it causes plant life to wither and die.

Wondrous Locations

During my brief sojourn to Yggdrasil, it was only possible for Orrin Bristletail to escort me to a mere handful of its many notable landmarks. I have recorded details of the wondrous locations that we visited below.

THE EYRIE

At the top of the tree sits an eagle the size of a roc. No one knows the eagle's name—he keeps it to himself—but he sees much of what goes on in the Nine Worlds from his vantage point. A smaller **giant eagle** named Vedfolnir also watches from on top of the great eagle's head so that nothing is missed.

Ratatosk visit the eagles each morning and evening to find out the latest goings-on and to relay news from the lower branches and the roots of Yggdrasil to the two giant birds. The little creatures enjoy embellishing what they've heard in order to stir up trouble, and it's hard to know what the eagle truly saw without climbing to the top of the tree to ask him yourself. Sometimes, the great eagle gets so annoyed by what the ratatosk tell him others are saying about him that he threatens to deal with the slanderers first hand and has to be calmed down by Vedfolnir.

Hook. The ratatosk go too far and succeed in provoking the great eagle with their tittle-tattle. Furious, he leaves his perch and flies down to the Corpse Shore to confront Nidhogg. Vedfolnir wants to go after him and persuade him to come back, but who will keep watch over the Nine Worlds while both eagles are gone? The giant eagle is desperate—can the PCs be trusted to stand in? And if they do, what interesting things do they witness?

WOTAN'S GALLOWS

High in the branches of the tree is the sacred place where Wotan hung himself from Yggdrasil, wounded by a spear and without food or drink, for nine days and nights. At the end of his ordeal, the god screamed in agony as he pulled knowledge of rune magic from Ginnungagap, the Yawning Void.

A village of ravenfolk has grown up on the branches close to this holy site. Perched precariously in a crook of the tree, the rookery is a bewildering mishmash of architectural styles and building materials and is home to around 100 ravenfolk, many of them doom croakers. When the wisest of these mystics die, their souls will hang from Wotan's Gallows for seven nights after which time an egg will appear in the place where they died. The departed huginn hatches from the egg, reincarnated into a new body. The souls appear as twinkling motes of light. A dozen or so can usually be seen hanging from the branches.

Hook. The PCs are hired to escort a pilgrim from the Northlands to Yggdrasil, so she can hang herself from Wotan's Gallows and learn the secrets of the runes. Brave PCs wishing to undertake the ordeal themselves must offer a gift to Dreamwhisper, the high doom croaker, a venerable huginn with feathers of pure white, save for a black ring around one eye – a sign of Wotan's favor. Dreamwhisper hops excitedly from one foot to the other while waiting to see what the PCs have brought him. This should be something shiny or glittery and preferably magic.

Each day the PC spends hanging from the tree, they must make a death save with advantage. Achieving three successes means the PC has survived the ordeal and gains one of the benefits below. Three failures means death. Once the ritual has begun, the doom croakers will not interrupt it, though the PC's companions can.

- Seek the wisdom of Wotan, gaining the answers to up to five questions as the *contact other plane spell* (no saving throw required).
- Gain the Rune Knowledge feat (see *Heroes Handbook*) and learn two runes, one of which must be Eiwaz.
- Gain the ability to cast the *speak with dead* spell once per day.

SQUIRREL COURT OF YGGDRASIL

We reached a small, unobtrusive knothole in the trunk of the tree. Orrin Bristletail scampered inside, gesturing for me to follow. I crawled on my hands and knees after him through the hollowed-out tunnels, taking care to keep him in sight. Eventually I heard a great cacophony up ahead as the passage opened out into a large chamber filled with chattering ratatosk . . .

In a secret location inside the trunk of the World Ash, guarded by ratatosk warlords, the leaders of the ratatosk hold court in a chamber large enough to accommodate hundreds of their kinfolk, all excitedly shouting out their contributions from balconies overlooking the council floor. The nine elders of the Squirrel Court—five females and four males—sit in a circle, listening to the latest news and gossip from across the planes, so they can determine who needs to know what, who will carry the message, and how far the truth should be bent. Matters before the court vary widely, ranging from messages from the gods themselves and dire portents witnessed by the eagle in the Eyrie to what really happened on the wedding night of Hosvir the Unlucky and Rosmunda, daughter of Halvar Flat-Nose.

Hook. The PCs have uncovered evidence that Loki and the Cult of Ragnarok have entered into a dark alliance with the Night Cauldron of Chernobog. Warnings need to be issued to the priests of the Northern Gods and the PCs travel to Yggdrasil to ask the ratatosk to get the word out, preferably without embellishment. As payment, the Squirrel Court demands nine golden acorns—one for each elder—to be taken from the Splendid Oak growing in the Summer Lands. A bold raid across the planes lies ahead.

OWLS, ROSES, AND THORNS: LOST COURTS OF THE ELVES

by Wolfgang Baur

Elvish courts have always been strange places—to mortals anyway. They are somewhat like royal courts among humans, but because of elvish and fey longevity, the fey courts are far more dominated by single figures and for much longer periods, and these factors invariably leave their mark across centuries, setting down quirks, customs, traditions, and arcane and court law. Each founder's interests often become enshrined in the magic, architecture, fashions, and even speech of the courts, most having their own preferred courtly dialect: the Strigian Elvish dialect of the Court of Owls used loan words from Druidish scriptures and ritual while the Rosy Elvish dialect of the Rose Court was known for complex speech and obligatory rhyme, especially in forms of address.

The members of a fey court consist of vassals, servants, and family of elvish nobles, invariably major royalty such as dukes, princesses, kings and queens, emperors and imperatrixes—in a few cases, without the title but with all the influence. Each court revolves around its founders as the moon chases the sun. The most balanced tend to be founded married couples but sometimes by single rulers of great influence or charm.

Here are three courts from the list of the famous courts of the Valeran Empire at its height. There were more than two dozen courts known over the imperial years, and many others still remain active in the Summer Lands and in hidden places on the branches of Yggdrasil, aloft in airy realms, or in other hidden places of Midgard far from the Seven Cities and Dornig.

Court of Owls (Arbonesse)

For a long time, the Court of Owls was the primary site of elvish pilgrimage for druids and followers of the old ways as well as worshippers of the forested, shadowed branches of the elvish pantheon: Holda, Yarila and Porevit, and Sarastra. Its founder was the archdruid Illem Quinor, a pious and stern elf who founded the Circle of Owls and whose adherents served the elvish empire throughout their territories as shapeshifting, keen-eyed scouts and (sometimes) saboteurs. While most visitors to the Court of Owls were pilgrims and priests, hidden among those masses were always a few spies bringing their reports to the Roost, the small but ornately gilded chamber where the archdruid listened, pondered, and sent further missives to the emperor or imperatrix on matters that directly concerned the pantheon or the empire.

When the elves retreated to the Summer Lands and the empire faded away, the library of the Court of Owls was burned to the ground. Most histories say the fire was ordered by Quinor himself, for its libraries contained far too many secrets best kept away from grasping dwarves and humans. Others claim that a vindictive gnomish servant, bitter at the command to depart and unwilling to leave human and elfmarked friends behind, set the blaze. Many volumes are said to have been carried off during the fire by gnomes and other servants, and a few were found later by scavengers surprised to note their pages were inviolate—legible and whole—despite a thick coating of ash on their covers. These "lost books of Quinor" are highly sought after as they remain one of the very few exemplars of elvish magic available to non-elves. Most are believed to have wound up in Bemmea or Maillon, though at least one necromantic volume is said to have been carried off by nightgaunts winging their way to the Scarlet Citadel. These books can all be authenticated by the presence of the Archdruid's Seal, an inked design of an owl, holly leaves and branches, together with elvish runes spelling out "Eternally Watchful," with the whole rendered as an arcane mark that resists erasure and tampering (in a few cases, a lead imprint of the seal attached by a ribbon—these are older but also less secure methods of authenticating a lost book of Quinor).

What truly remains of the Court of Owls is a matter of some discussion. A few druids and pilgrims still visit in the summer months and refer to themselves as the New Court of Owls, but this is draping themselves in lost glories. Structurally, the fine wooden buildings are all fallen into decay, the stone foundations remain true but overgrown with moss and even cavelight moss, and some dark and hungry spirit inhabits the court's groves and streams. Many visitors return missing a horse, ox, or dog, and a few complain that "lustful, beguiling music" can be heard from the famous court's stream.

This stream is the Noctuan Water, a fresh, babbling bit of a stream, rarely more than a foot deep in most places, which still runs from a hillside and then crosses mid-air over the fetid moat to the outer courtyards. In some places, the Noctuan Water is lifted by arcane means to flow into the kitchens and halls; in other places, it is cleansed by elemental magic. At its final stop, it flows into a large, still pool in the main courtyard, still lined with reeds and lilies, before disappearing underground. An undine or water spirit may still live in a cavern below.

Court of Roses (Arbonesse)

The Court of Roses was devoted to the young and the poor among the elves. It was a place of learning, courtship, carousing, famed for its poetry and its Silver Shrine of Baccolon as well as the Great Hall of the Crimson Queen Othaniel. She was both the wealthiest patroness of elvish arts and learning and (so whispers maintained) the most ruthless keeper of the empire's records, genealogies, and arcane bloodlines—the foundation on which titles, peerage, inheritances, and fiefdoms rose and fell.

Queen Othaniel's public patronage of Baccolon was largely a boisterous, popular way to hide her devotion to Sarastra and her teaching of young elvish wizards, sorcerers, and other arcanists about high magic, shadow and illuminated rituals, and rites that strengthened ley lines, that built new shadow roads, and that even moved ley lines miles across the empire to thwart enemies or reward the emperor's chosen. Her titles ran as Her Sanguine and Ethereal Majesty, Othaniel Qivaressa, the Red Queen of Baccolon, Countess of the Lower Arbonesse, Baroness of Steinhafen, Mistress of the Arcane Roads, and Keeper of the Key of Seven Stars, Beloved of the Poets and Immortal in Song.

The Rose Court is now a place of ghosts, as well as dusty arcane workshops filled with animated oozes burning with cold light, and a few other horrors such as clockwork poets, animated undead cats with particularly fluffy and luminous fur, and rats of unseemly intelligence. Its famous stained-glass windows were all removed and conjured away during the Retreat: tall vacant windows and at least two enormous round ones remain as the frames where enormous glass once filled the air with light and pleasing shadows. Smaller, stained-glass windows were said to have remained but have all been looted as well; a few have been set into new temples and taverns as far afield as Reywald and Salzbach.

Somewhere within its ruins are likely some arcane treasures, and (if some of the human histories are true) somewhere beneath the court should be the Crimson Queen's dungeons and workshops. Several "true and authentic" maps of these workshops exist, though the two best known disagree with one another on such simple matters as where the entrance to the chambers is; most agree these maps are all dated long after the Retreat. Banshees, phantoms, and occasionally pilgrims of Sarastra's darker traditions can be found in the buildings, though most of these are purely nocturnal visitors, so the merely curious are advised to visit by daylight when the ruins are at their best and the odds of a violent attack by undead or alchemical horrors are minimal.

One item of especial interest can still be found quite easily: the talking roses of the court still grow wild and rambling in what was once the famous Prickling Maze where young elves played and older, perhaps inebriated elves sought to question the foliage in pursuit of green wisdom or amusing anecdotes. The talking roses speak the Rosy dialect of Elvish and may be the last to do so; they are widely versed in weather lore, botany, and the distinct cries of any bird or animal inhabiting the ruins, but they are also quite melancholy still at having no sparkling courtiers to speak with. A few wilder legends claim that old blood rituals once turned the white roses red and summoned forth a dark goddess from the woods or that void pipes can still be heard in the Prickling Maze at dawn and dusk. Gardeners who have attempted to take a cutting or transplant from among the talking roses have, thus far, been prevented by children of the briar and other floral guardians. But such a bloom would surely bring a smile to the face of any of the elves who remember the Rose Court at its height.

Griffon Court (Margreve)

By elvish noble standards, the Griffon Court was a backwater of little consequence: a summer camp to learn griffon riding, to hunt deer in the Margreve, to ponder a few of the mysteries of the deep forest, and perhaps to dally with the shadow fey if they showed themselves at all. The territory is surrounded by marshy woodlands and thickets of thorn and briar so ancient that they require axes to clear—most visitors come by ley roads or on griffon wing if they come at all.

And there are still reasons to visit. For the elvish armies, the Griffon Court was an important breeding and nesting ground for two-headed eagles, hippogriffs, wyverns, and griffons, as well as (at one time) for occasional fey drakes or moon drakes given as gifts among the nobles. It was also a crucial training grounds for knights and captains, not the glamorous nobles but the well-trained leaders who made sure that elvish armies could handle any rebellion and expand their rule over patient centuries. So it was a martial court from the beginning, but it also retained pride in its messenger services, flying couriers and making deliveries by air from Thorn to Gennecka and to Liadmura and Velersh.

And despite the retreat of the elves, it is still at least somewhat inhabited. Four elves, twenty elfmarked, and a scattering of gnomes and halflings keep the place in running order and maintain a stable of six to ten trained Margreve griffons at all times for the use of the imperatrix on her rounds and hunts. Since her health has declined, these choice beasts are more often given to her various favorites at court, but they are still trained at the hunting lodge that was once home to several hundred of the empire's brightest knights, young squires of the martial orders, and a famed school of rangers and archers.

Rumor has it that some elements of the Griffon Court's armor, weapons, and training methods remain available to worthy elves and elf-blooded humans, but on the whole, the court is not welcoming place. Built on a stony crag above much of the forest canopy and with three large clearings to handle training, flying, and a modest orchard and viticulture, it more resembles a woodland village than one of the esteemed homes of the elvish legions of old. Tunnels, armories, and barracks of the old Flying Fifth Legion (also called the Griffon Guard) are said to have been sealed off and are largely inaccessible to visitors. Only the court's commander, the Griffon Knight-Commander Alluvar of Rothenheim, Marshall of the Margreve and at least honorary general of the 5th legion, is believed to know the command words and to hold the arcane keys to the tunnels of the Flying Fifth. His wife Xendra, his son Ollivary (or more correctly, Alluvar the Younger), and his squire, young Fillibera of Liadmura, round out the garrison.

THE DRY LANDS: THE PLANE OF MOT

by Wolfgang Baur

Most branches of the great World Tree are noisy and full of powerful spirits: the battle cries of Valhalla, the shrieking of various hells and planes of torment, the fulsome chorus of celestial planes devoted to the harmonious celebration of the divine. By comparison, Evermaw, the plane of the dark god Mot (and the equally notorious Vardesain and Anu-Akma, fellow gods of the dead), is notable for its silence—a plane of enormous deserts of bones, dunes of dust, and rivers of blood and tears. These are the Dry Lands, the plane where life extends past its appointed span, where fate itself is thwarted with regularity, and where liches, vampires, and ghouls gather in enormous numbers to praise their patron and the font of vileness, to cheat death, to praise their protection against a certain voyage into the hells and the joy and strength of the god of the undead and his near-infinite legions.

Cheating Death and Praising Unlife

While most gods depend on the prayers and offerings of the living, Mot derives his power from the praise of the undead and the animated—from skeletons and zombies compelled to ape out thousands of near-meaningless (yet still efficacious) masses and sermons and from the much richer work of vampires in Morgau or the god-kings of Nuria-Natal in their deep and hidden crypts where their prayers and invocations echo year upon year through the centuries, offering praise to Mot and staving off true death for but a little longer.

Entering the Dry Lands

The plane of Mot itself is easy to reach for the undead; spells such as skull road open the pathway between any tomb and the Dry Lands. Gnolls and the priests of Anu-Akma are familiar with this path, said to be a ley line that was corrupted millennia ago, perhaps at the founding of Nuria itself, to lead not to other planes or to shadow but directly into the River of Tears and thus to the Eternal Palace.

The dry lands are home to several varieties of extremely strange terrain, rarely found elsewhere other than sometimes in particular hells. These are described below for the possible warning of future travelers.

Bone Deserts: The most common terrain within the Dry Place is bone desert; its sand is powdered bone and pebbles of bone not yet worn quite so small. Dunes, ramparts, and pebbled stretches of bone extend for miles. In some places, the bone itself is transformed by magic or the blood of the living into a cement-like material, suitable for building towers, castles, and walls. As undead require very little in the way of rest nourishment, most building are built for reasons of status, display, or trade.

Caverns of Unmaking: Tunnels and passages within the Dry Lands are often filled with raw necrotic energy that pulses through narrow spaces in waves. The inflict a body-wracking 3d12 hp necrotic damage (DC 16 Constitution for half). Unde find these caverns welcomin and healing; the necrotic damage restores both their energy and their sense of purpose. So many such caverns are inhabited by intelligent undead.

Cliffs of Gathered Memory Undead who have fallen into a state of minimal energy are often brought to this famous orange stone, carved to resemble a sort of honeycomb, miles wide and over 500 feet tall. Each small, hermetic chamber of the cliffs gathers memories from the undead and preserves their spirit, keeping it from advancing (or more to the point, descending) to other planes of being. The voices of millions can be heard within the cliffs. Distinguishing any particular voice or speaking with a particular undead spirit is impossible without *speak with dead, ancient shade*, or similar magic.

Living creatures that enter the small chambers suffer a powerful psychic attack that can both paralyze and weaken them. The white and orange walls within are soothing to undead, but living creatures find them stultifying, mind numbing, and oppressive. Unless a living creature makes a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw, they become immobile for 1 hour and take 2d12 hp psychic damage, their minds filled with visions of decay and death. Affected creatures must make another saving throw after 1 hour if still in the chamber or suffer the same effects again. Creatures that make a successful saving throw are permanently immune to the psychic attacks of that particular chamber.

Crackling Forests: The forests of the Dry Lands are not green but rather cartilaginous masses of splintered bones and dry, leathery leaves covered with fine black hair. These conglomerate into enormous, fernlike and treelike structures that the undead find impossibly beautiful and stirring and that living creatures find quite revolting or at least disturbing. Entering such a crackling forest requires a DC 14 Wisdom saving throw; those who succeed overcome their revulsion while those who fail must either be blindfolded or must take a long rest and try again—the place is simply hideously repellant.

When cut or broken, the trees themselves bleed a black milk that undead find nourishing and pleasant. Ghouls, vampires, and other corporeal undead delight in cracking open the hairy bark and gorging themselves on this thick syrup. For such creatures, devouring 1 pint of black milk is as restorative as devouring a living creature.

Eyes of Mot: While all gods have servants, those of Mot are especially obvious: flocks of undead vultures circle his realm at all times and are occasionally sent into the mortal world to see the success or failure of some plot or scheme that might further the dark god's goals. These undead can be treated as **hawks**, though they rarely enter combat. Their ragged feathers keep them above the fray, and their keen vision allows them to see and report on events anywhere in the realms of Undeath.

Eternal Palace of Mot: The Eternal Palace is a maze within a tomb, boxed into a labyrinth and hidden under miles of bone and dust. The entrance is a rather plain cavern guarded by two enormous, hulking gnolls with skeletal grins and halos of dark green runes (treat as void giants from *Creature Codex*). The interior is made of various rich materials, all supposedly taken from tombs, including golden couches and rich carpets, ebony tables and a throne of pure silver chased with a smell of dust and decay and embossed with shadows and motes of pure necrotic fire. The rooms are all quite grim under their gilding, reminiscent of tombs and mausoleums. A few bedchambers and kitchens are provided for those guests who require food and sleep, but most of the halls are kept bone-chillingly cold at night, and the air itself is rank; undead do not trouble to heat the palace nor to ventilate it properly.

River of Blood: This peculiar river reeks of iron and decay, like old blood or a butcher's abattoir. Undead are the only creatures able to enter its waters without risk; all other creatures suffer 2d6 necrotic damage for each round spent touching or immersed in it. The river itself is a muddy red tone, and undead often cluster along its banks. Small sections of congealed, scab-like material line the edges of the river. Undead from the plane of Evermaw call it Mother River or just the River. Its course meanders through hundreds of miles and ends in an enormous cataract said to lead directly to the Hell of Blood.

Some vampires and other blood drinkers find it very difficult to leave the River of Blood. They continue to feed over hours and days, growing to enormous, swollen sizes and attaining a distended appearance similar to an engorged tick. Their limbs and body often take on a bruised hue, and their hands, feet, and belly are often so round as to make mobility difficult. In some cases, these "deep drinkers" float along the river until reaching the planar cataract mentioned previously. Most undead believe that these undead are reborn as devils in the Hell of Blood.

River of Tears: Flowing around the roots of the World Tree as well as through many planes leading from the mortal world to the outer realms of gods and afterlife, the River of Tears does wind through the plane of Evermaw and does abut the Eternal Palace and its various fortifications and temples. Indeed, it is one of the best ways out of the plane, as the River of Tears is trafficked by ferry demons and angelic guides, both eager to win souls to their own destinations. Boarding their craft requires the customary 2 copper pennies, though the destination is not always an improvement. A number of ferry demons have (it is said) become adept at spinning various celestial-seeming illusions; these disguises only fall away when the demon arrives at some place outside Evermaw—this might be Yggdrasil or Asgard but more often is one of the hells or some hideous demonic demi-plane.

Entering the waters of the River of Tears without powerful magical protection strips away memories and the fuss and ambitions of a mortal life from any non-planar creature. Each round that a creature begins while within or touching the waters of the River of Tears, they must make a DC 12 Charisma saving throw; each failed saving throw reduces their level by 1 and removes a year's worth of its memories and character. After five failed saving throws, it is always reduced to a "new planar" state, remembering only its name, its former profession and some basic skills, and either 1) its patron god if it was a priest or especially devout worshipper or 2) a single great goal, secret, or ambition of its former life (if it was unconcerned by divine matters).

Skull Ziggurats: Piled as much as 50 or 60 feet high, the skull ziggurats are places of sacrifice, though in many cases the creatures being offered to the gods are skeletons or zombies or other lesser undead, rather than living creatures or people (both quite rare in Evermaw as one might expect). These ziggurats are usually claimed for either Mot, Vardesain, or Anu-Akma, but they are often abandoned except during unholy conjunctions or ancient festivals that are obscure enough that even most liches and specters do not know what their original purpose was. These include the Festival of the Third Voyager (Anu-Akma), the Feast of the Greater Cages (Vardesain), and the Transference of the Ebon Idol (Mot).

Spells of the Undead

While necromancy is practiced heavily in the Dry Lands, some spells seem especially common there. These spells are usually available to wizards and priests (but not bards or druids).

ANCIENT SHADE

5th-level necromancy

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 10 feet

Components: V, S, M (burning candles of planar origin, 500 gp)

Duration: 10 minutes

You grant the semblance of life and intelligence to a pile of bones or even bone dust of your choice within range, allowing the ancient spirit to answer the questions you pose. These remains can be the remnants of undead, including animated but unintelligent undead such as skeletons and zombies (intelligent undead are not affected). It can have died centuries ago, though the older the spirit called, the less it remembers of its mortal life.

Until the spell ends, you can ask the ancient spirit up to five questions if it died within the past year, four questions within ten years, three questions within one hundred years, two questions within one thousand years, and but a single question for spirits more than one thousand years dead. The ancient shade knows only what it knew in life, including the languages it knew. Answers are usually brief, cryptic, or repetitive, and the corpse is under no compulsion to offer a truthful answer if you are hostile to it or it recognizes you as an enemy. This spell doesn't return the creature's soul to its body, only its animating spirit. Thus, the corpse can't learn new information, doesn't comprehend anything that has happened since it died, and can't speculate about future events.

ETERNAL ECHO

3rd-level necromancy

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 60 feet

Components: V

Duration: Concentration

You gain a portentous voice of compelling power, commanding all undead within 60 feet that fail a Wisdom saving throw. This overrides any prior loyalty to spellcasters such as necromancers or evil priests, and it can nullify the effect of a Turn Undead result from a cleric.

REASSEMBLE

5th-level necromancy

Casting Time: 1 hour

Range: Touch

Components: V, S, M (1 gallon of black milk of Evermaw; consumed)

Duration: Instantaneous

You touch an undead creature (dust and bones suffice) destroyed not more than 10 hours ago; the creature is surrounded by purple fire for 1 round and is returned to life with full hit points. This spell has no effect on any creatures except undead, and it cannot restore a lich whose phylactery has been destroyed, a vampire destroyed by sunlight, any undead whose remains are destroyed by fire, acid, or holy water, or any remains affected by a *bless* or *gentle repose* spell.

This spell doesn't remove magical effects. If they aren't removed prior to casting, they return when the undead creature comes back to life.

This spell closes all mortal wounds but doesn't restore missing body parts. If the creature doesn't have body parts or organs necessary for survival, the spell fails.

Sudden reassembly is an ordeal involving enormous expenditure of necrotic energy; ley line casters within 5 miles are aware that some great shift in life forces has occurred and a sense of its direction. The target takes a –4 penalty to all attacks, saves, and ability checks.

Every time it finishes a long rest, the penalty is reduced by 1 until it disappears.

SKULL ROAD

5th-level conjuration

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 60 feet

Components: V, S, M (ivory worth at least 500 gp)

Duration: Concentration, up to 1 minute

You conjure a portal linking an unoccupied space you can see within range to an imprecise location on the plane of Evermaw. The portal is a circular opening, which you can make 5–20 feet in diameter. You can orient the portal in any direction you choose. The portal lasts for the duration.

If your casting is at 5th level, this opens a pathway to the River of Tears, to the Vitreous Mire, or to the Plains of Bone—travel to a settlement can take up to 7 days (1d6+1). If cast at 7th level, the *skull road* spell opens a portal to a small settlement of gnolls, ghouls, or shadows on the plane near the Eternal Palace of Mot or a similar settlement.

Undead casters can use this spell in the reverse direction, opening a portal from Evermaw to the mortal world, though with similar restrictions. At 5th level, the portal opens in a dark forest, cavern, or ruins far from habitation. At 7th level, the skull road leads directly to a tomb, cemetery, or mass grave near a humanoid settlement of some kind.

STAFF OF VIOLET FIRE

4th-level evocation

Casting Time: 1 bonus action

Range: Self

Components: V, S, M (mummy dust)

Duration: Concentration, but see description

You create a quarterstaff of pure necrotic energy that blazes with intense purple light; it appears in your chosen hand. If you let it go, it disappears, though you can evoke it again as a bonus action.

This staff is an extremely unstable and impermanent magic item; it has 10 charges and does not require attunement. The wielder can use one of three effects:

- By using your action to make a melee attack and expending 1 charge, you can attack with it. On a hit, the target takes 27 (5d10) necrotic damage.
- By expending 2 charges, you can release bolts of necrotic fire against up to 3 targets as ranged attacks for 8 (1d8+4) necrotic damage each.
- By expending 3 charges, you can negate any radiant spell as a reaction or dispel an angelic ward as an action (see *Midgard Heroes Handbook* or *Deep Magic: Angelic Wards*).

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 6th level or higher, the melee damage increases by 1d10 for every two slot levels above 4th, or you add one additional ranged bolt for every two slots above 4th.

ON THE CITY OF BRASS AND THE HIERARCHY OF THE GENIES

by Jeff Grubb

Of all the settlements and all the citadels to be found within the Elemental Planes, the best known by far and the most visited is the City of Brass, located in the Plane of Elemental Fire. There are other such cities, mighty metropolises in the other Inner Planes, but the Burnished City sees the greatest number of visitors—elemental, infernal, and otherwise.

The chief reason for this is the ruling inhabitants of the city: the efreeti, a powerful genie race. The efreeti are black-hearted and cruel but are bound both by honor and their own legal codes, and this lawful tendency makes their domain an ideal meeting ground for different species from all the planes. Under the wise oversight of Grand Sultan Ixingaltrix—may his name ever be praised—the city is a crossroad and marketplace, a prison, a refuge, and a neutral ground for all who are willing to bend a knee and tug a forelock in obeisance to its master's rule.

The power of the grand sultan—be he ever powerful—keeps the more malignant nature of their fiery native plane at bay and provides a safe haven where even a water-dwelling marid can find comfort (though they complain mightily about the dryness of the air). His Most Wise Majesty rules with an iron hand, and justice for those who do not act in accordance with his wishes is both swift and often fatal. As a result, the City of Brass is a location that can host devils and archons, demons and petty godlings, and merchants of all stripes, confident of their (relative) protection.

The City of Brass is also a place of exile and refuge. Demon lords who have lost their home planes, archdukes on the outs with the Infernal Hierarchy, and powerful wizards who have crossed one too many patrons all can be found within its walls. Some enjoy their exile while others continually plot and plan for their inevitable return to power. The grand sultan—who like a wise father allows his children their own futures—permits such conspiring as long as it does not threaten the Charcoal Throne.

The confluence of so many peoples from so many planes makes the city a great trading hub where merchants from half a hundred empires, planar layers, and demiplanes come to seek out the unique and the expensive. Dreams are for sale here as are hopes and futures and birthrights. If it cannot be found here, someone may be located in its bathhouses and gambling dens who can find it for a very affordable price.

Magic, in particular, is a currency in the City of Brass, and trade is brisk. The grand sultan—his wisdom be unquestioned—often punishes those who violate his considerate rule by imprisonment in enchanted iron flasks for a century or two, and there are said to be huge vaults of them beneath his palace. Given the large number of prisoners, it is little wonder that sometimes a flask or ten are forgotten or fall into the hands of others or are even removed and cast out into the Material Plane, so the creatures within cannot be found and freed at the end of their sentence. Trade in such matters, and everything else, is common here.

The City of Brass is organized, and all within know their place. The grand sultan—who hears when you speak his name—rules wisely from his Charcoal Throne. He is well served by six great pashas, also efreeti, who serve as advisors and commanders of his armies. The pashas, in turn, are the leading lights of all the great and powerful noble genies of the city, which are the mightiest of their species, including sage djinni, dour dao, and cunning marids. All these beings, while powerful, are considered less trustworthy than an efreeti who gives their word (though the exact wording should always be checked). The efreeti consider themselves the most honest of the genie peoples.

Beneath the most noble of the genies are the collection known to mortals simply as genies (do not call them "common" or "ordinary" at peril of one's life). Within the Burnished City, it is primarily efreeti, of course, but also a number of the other known races who form a sort of gentry to the more powerful nobles. They have their own bases of power and areas of expertise, and many hold domains far from the city itself and merely maintain villas within its walls or come simply to conduct business.

Beneath the genies themselves—sentient creatures of pure elemental fury—are the jann who, like the genies, are made of elemental power but, unlike the genies, have a muddled heritage, which consists of a mix of primal elements. These beings are responsible for the day-to-day work within the city and are often seen as merchants, magical researchers, overseers, instructors, entertainers, and captains of the great planar dromons. They maintain among themselves the Para-Elemental Parliament for sorting out their own matters in the service of the greater genies that they are dedicated to.

The jann themselves have servants, and these include both powerful creatures—elemental and mortal—as well as those whose primordial blood is mixed with those of the mortal planes. These are the jinnborn, mortal beings in whose blood flows the elemental power of the genies and other such creatures. Within the hierarchy of the City of Brass, the jinnborn are the workers, team bosses, clerks, guard captains, and major domos who make sure all works like clockwork within the Burnished Citadel.

The jinnborn are both mortal and primordial, and serving them are the mortals themselves. Most of these are slaves, for within the city, slavery is a recognized fact. Easily identified by a copper band around the neck, creatures of all mortal species find their way there as slaves. Some are voluntary, rescued from death by jann traders who offer salvation in exchange for servitude. Some are victims, taken in raids led by efreeti hunting parties. Some are merely unfortunate, allowed to work off a debt or a bet with servitude. Slavery is recognized and protected within the city, and the grand sultan—may his protection always extend over us all—deals harshly with those who seek to overturn the established order. Rebellious or untrustworthy slaves may be sold to clients in other planes or merely cast out of the city into the seething chaos that surrounds it.

Mortal visitors are treated better than slaves, and in general, within the social pecking order, they are at the same level as jinnborn; the most powerful are equivalent in status to jann or run-of-the-mill genies. Those visitors with a fire-based background (some dragons, some devils, some giants) are particularly welcome. Travelers with magical abilities are more highly valued and respected than those without, and those with the ability to create—be it in song, dance, or story—have the greatest value of all. Indeed, such individuals risk being spirited away and bound with a copper torc by a more powerful genie who finds them appealing.

Visitors to the City of Brass are hereby warned: this is a place of great order, but it is an order quite alien to many from other planes. The law of the grand sultan—may his years be eternal—is absolute, shaded only by the mercy of his court. Come to the city, trade in its bazaars, browse the iron-shod books of its great libraries, sup with devils and demons and exiled princes, but watch your step lest you be fitted for a copper torc or an iron flask.

Jann of the Burnished City

The genies of the Elemental Planes keep slaves, but they also need servants—individuals powerful enough to run their petty citadels and elemental empires but not rise to become rivals to their power. These are the jann, beings made of multiple primal elements. A beautiful people of striking appearance and demeanor, they suffer the egos of their masters and keep such great metropolises as the City of Brass in some sense of order.

Made of Many Elements. While the genies represent a purity of their elemental types, the jann are the grand sultan's middlemen:

- ***The House of Ooze*** is made up of those jann for whom primordial water and earth are dominant. Its people have oily, supple skin and tend toward green eyes. They rarely speak in certitudes and serve as the dealers, healers, and alchemists for their genie masters.
- ***The House of Smoke*** is made up of those jann for whom primordial fire and air are dominant. Its members have dry skin and hair, which breaks up as a cloud behind them. They tend toward grey eyes, and their changeable nature makes them skilled diplomats and entertainers.
- ***The House of Magma*** is made up of those jann for whom primordial fire and earth are dominant. They have red eyes and often a shock of red hair among the dark strands. They are the soldiers and raiders of domains, such as the City of Brass, and often venture into the Prime Material with slave-catching parties.
- ***The House of Ice*** is made up of those jann for whom primordial water and air are dominant. They have blue eyes and white hair, sometimes only a few strands but often their entire head is covered with ivory locks. They are considered patient and serve as guards, jailors, and collectors.

A Para-Elemental Parliament. The jann within the City of Brass and in other great genie domains operate as a second government, a bureaucracy that keeps matters on an even keel and keeps any one faction or personality from upsetting the status quo and demanding the attention of the great sultan—may his people always prosper. This Para-Elemental Parliament does not seek power for itself but will balance one group against the others to keep the peace.

Free People of the Desert. Not all jann are pleased with the serving of more powerful genies, and some flee to form their own societies in the barren and arid places of the world. Gathering mortals in their wake, they form large caravans and dominate desert oases with their opulent tent cities. Some go further, encouraging rebellion against their former masters and freeing slaves that have been unjustly captured. Their ability to shift among the elemental planes makes them hard to catch, and their relationship (familial or social) with members of the Para-Elemental Parliament makes the city-bound jann sympathetic to their cause.

JANN

Medium elemental, neutral

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)

Hit Points 95 (10d8 + 50)

Speed 30 ft., fly 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	16 (+3)	20 (+5)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	18 (+4)

Saving Throws Int +5 Wis +5 Cha +7

Condition Immunities See *Para-elemental Nature* below.

Senses Darkvision 120 ft, passive Perception 13

Languages Aquan, Auran, Ignan, Terran

Challenge 8 (3,900 XP)

Breathless. Jann have no need to breathe, though do so out of courtesy or in order to speak. They cannot drown or be victims of poisonous gas or other attacks that require breathing.

Elemental Demise. If the jann dies, their body disintegrates into its elemental parts (a puddle of ooze, a wisp of smoke, the embers of magma, or melting shards of ice), leaving behind only the equipment the jann was wearing or carrying.

Innate Spellcasting. The jann's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 16, + 8 to hit with spell attacks). They can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

3/day: *invisibility*

2/day each: *enlarge/reduce, speak with animals*

1/day each: *create food/water, etherealness, planeshift* (Material and Elemental Planes only)

Para-Elemental Nature. Jann are made of a mixture of all primordial elements but fall into one of four houses or kingdoms, each with differing abilities:

House of Ooze—Damage resistance to piercing weapons.

House of Smoke—Damage resistance to slashing weapons.

House of Magma—Immunity to fire.

House of Ice—Immunity to cold.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The jann makes two great scimitar attacks or two longbow attacks. If armed with two scimitars, they may make two scimitar attacks and one bonus scimitar attack.

Great Scimitar (Treat as Greatsword). *Melee Weapon Attack*: +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 damage (2d6 + 4) slashing damage.

Scimitar. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 damage (1d6 + 4) slashing damage. The bonus attack, if it hits, deals only 3 (1d6) slashing damage.

Longbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack*: +7 to hit, range 150/600 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 damage (1d8 + 3) piercing damage.

REACTION

Parry. The jann adds +3 to their AC against one melee attack that would hit them. To do so, the jann must see the attacker and be wielding a melee weapon.

THE CURIOUS PLACES YOU'LL FIND

by Richard Pett

The boiling, seething mass of the City of Brass defies any attempt but the broadest to catalogue her. Her teeming, steaming maze of streets and sinners and curious locales seems endless with new places born from the streets by the hour—a cycle of growing and withering akin to the countless lives of her inhabitants. Some places are quickly lost, some die, some are mysteriously found after disappearing, and others are to be avoided if possible, but even these have a nasty habit of turning up somehow when wanderers find themselves on the very path they most wanted to avoid.

Here is a small selection of curious locations that may (or may not) be encountered on a trip down her streets. Our intention is to give you inspiration to stage adventures here and also, hopefully, to inspire you to create your own crooked corners of the magnificent City of Brass!

The Gulping Orifice (aka Queen Maw, The Mad Jig at the Fall of All Flames)

"The Gulper? Yes, I've seen her once, and once was enough. To be truthful, you more feel her and hear her than see her—looking into her soul too deep scorches the eyes, you see. I've heard tell of mariners that catch a glimpse of her, and it's the last thing they ever see. Unless they see the buildings said to be inside her—great impossible cliffs of worked stone and strange metal sometimes glimpsed deep within her jowls."

Lurking in the deepest reaches of the Sea of Fire, the Gulping Maw is a vast whirlpool of molten lava said to have a soul and anger all its own. So deep, she is said to reach into the heart of the world and to have her soul buried there—the Gulper is part creature, part god of the city. A marriage of a dozen conjoined, schizophrenic fire elementals of the greatest size occasionally seen dancing in the sea, the Gulper is tended by a cabal of salamanders that lurk in the buildings that are occasionally glimpsed when the whirlpool is formed, an occasional event linked to the passing and alignment of heavenly bodies. So far, the beast has only ever been partially awoken by such events, raising it into a short-lived storm of fury and lava. The salamanders seek to change that.

Calling themselves the Heralds of the Fiery Bride, the score or so of salamanders—all paragons of their own race—work tirelessly to permanently awaken their living god in the hope of bringing her to terrible life. Hoping, of course, that she will be grateful for their "gift" and assist them in their secret goal of dominating the City of Brass. We mentioned that each of the heralds is a paragon, which is true of itself, but they are not physical paragons—indeed, in this regard, they are the very opposite, struck down by some malignant, terrible affliction that has changed their bodies, turning each into an abomination. The leader of the heralds, the appalling Scalded Queen, is herself the most disfigured of all the salamanders. Dragging her distended, bloated, serpentine form about their temple, she commands a small army of terrified henchmen, worshippers, and slaves throughout the city, always with the aim of unravelling the mystery of the connection between Queen Maw and the stars.

The Ephemeral Gyre Temple of Baal and the Penance of the Faithless

Swelling like some dreadful lesion from the surface of the Sea of Fire, a bloated mass of blackened stone floats upon the lava. Impossibly, this stone has been worked or forced into a structure—you can see walkways and archways and rooms within its terrible mass as it slowly, spastically slithers across the surface of the Sea of Fire with the speed of hands upon a clock. A great, glowering doorway, which appears to be a horned dragon's head leering from the flames, gazes outward from this strange place whilst above rises a crooked spire.

Slithering atop a slumbering corner of the Sea of Fire, the Ephemeral Temple is a curiously twisted structure—if structure is the right word—born of the lava of the sea itself and growing upward and outward. It is a place birthed by fire and fury and has become a shrine for those who worship Baal, Lord of Fire and Master of Noble Sacrifice, King of All Dragons.

The founder and leader of the temple is the Visionary, a gnoll whose eyes were removed by heartless slavers when he was but a child but who can see—or perhaps more correctly feel and hear—the temple. It was he who walked across the lava in the first place when he was but a child, an act taken by those who saw it as madness but which brought the gnoll to this peculiar shrine. Perhaps, some say, it was he who birthed or caused the place to rise in the beginning. The Visionary is a fearsome yet just figure, his words echoing the moods of the fire below and about him in tone only, for he is always measured in what he says and does. His wisdom is sought by many, but the means to reach it keep the less devout at bay, as we shall see shortly.

All worshippers of Baal are welcome here, but the presence of the Visionary draws many gnolls to the transient shrine. Many have stayed. A core of monks of Baal tend and collect holy relics here, and the now-ancient Visionary has a lifetime of gifts and objects of great and holy power, many given in return for his vision and advice and blessings. The place glows with them, gold winks from every corner, jewels from every shadow. The shrine is now the size of a church, yet its growing continues, and recently, stretching from atop the structure, a great twisting spire rises—said by some to be the spine of a great dragon being birthed from the sea itself. In recent days, the Visionary and his monks have been seeking a dragonkin said to bear a special mark that will signify them as the new Visionary. Is the spire a herald of joy or portent of woe?

The fickle temple slowly dances across the surface of the great and terrible Sea of Fire, sometimes shedding her parts (often with deadly result). Worse awaits the faithful than a mere fickle structure, however. The truly faithful do not seek to fly or find magical means of crossing to the place of most holy worship—they walk there. To assist in this seemingly impossible journey of stepping across the surface of a sea of molten magma, a small but redoubtable group of djinni and efreeti guides are on hand to offer the faithful advice on the best paths to tread, where no paths exist. Some are said to be ascetics who seek to slay and rob the faithful. Such villains meet awful fiery ends if the monks find them.

Yet many still take the walk across lava and live and are blessed.

The nearest shore houses a series of ghats where the faithful to Baal are burned and cast into the sea itself. Some fanatical worshippers of Baal have cast themselves into the sea in the vain hope that they will be reborn as dragons.

A series of festivals culminates in the Day of Stepping, the annual date when the Visionary first stepped across the Sea of Fire and entered the temple, a place he has rumored never to have left since. This festival is opulent; the streets dance with the aroma of incense and the finery of gold holy objects. Monks of the shrine go into the city with gifts of great wealth for anyone deemed to be holy by them, guided by their fiery god's hand.

The Vent, the Myriad, and the Ways of Steam

Rumors persist of a series of secret, possibly interdimensional passages said to crawl their way across the city, linking its more outré and repellent parts—as well as providing easy access between.

The tales are, as so often occurs in the fabulous City of Brass, true. The passages are extremely fickle and dangerous, however, as they host an equally erratic series of fearful vents, lurking in the shadows and cracks of the city, that occasionally boil outward, cooking anything within the corridors, stripping flesh and boiling bones. A small, some might say untrustworthy, group of minotaur guides first found the Ways and claim knowledge of her moods.

Did we say her moods? Well, yes, because this maze is alive.

These guides are paranoid about their own security and can be impossible to locate—as everyone with power wants to know where the Ways go and how they can be navigated. The thieves' guilds in particular are always seeking to gather more knowledge about the Ways and her anger.

The Ways are not simply passages, however. They are indeed living things tended like children by their doting and fierce mother who lurks at the edges of sight in an abandoned place deep in the very bowels of the city. The mother does not have a name, but her children sometimes cry out for her help if strangers invade their home and being. The various children are linkages made of both flesh, bone, and stone—intertwined—their moods reflected in the way the corridors that make up their bodies appear. Sometimes they sing, their flanks hiding angelic faces and statues that, of course, come to life to draw invaders into the walls, bolstering their own number with trapped souls of intruders. Sometimes they play, become things that trap and tear. Sometimes they cry aloud in terror, and then their mother arrives in a scalding scream of boiling steam and fury.

Occasionally, one of the children goes mad, her crooked form twisting into the realms of the outer city and corrupting them.

The minotaurs who dare these Ways often know the children by name, can speak with them, appeal to them, and ask them to guide their journey. Many go to great lengths to protect and help the Ways, treating them like their own kin. These guides see themselves often as more than simple guides though: they view themselves as guardians of a special maze that deserves their love and respect. However, others and some of their own kin use the Ways to move across the city, carrying out assassinations, spying, theft. These villains cross the Ways furtively, quickly, on routes that can never be mapped but that are known to them. Mastery of the Ways brings power to the few who know them if they can avoid the attentions of the minotaurs who seek to protect them.

And the Ways themselves.

The Secret Souk of Utterances

Lurking within the city—and somehow encountered when least expected or unlooked for—are a cabal of insular djinni known as the Uttering, and they run a secret souk. They do not sell to those they do not know, for they deal in a curious commodity: they sell voices and the words those voices speak. Those of the Uttering are a group of wizards who specialize in magic that draws and keeps words and secrets from the lips of those who utter them, even if they are separated by time and space.

Words are power, the members of the Uttering know, and many take great personal risks to become masters of their art, taking words, sometimes even before they are uttered, and selling them. This group is feared, loathed, and admired in equal measure, and they take great pains to hide their secrets and rarely if ever sell—and only to those they trust. Gaining their trust can be the work of many years.

No signs litter the souk, no clue that anything is for sale in the unremarkable corner of the City of Brass this market calls home. A bare score of these wizards know the secrets of Utterance Arcana, their number kept low by fear of discovery, fear of weakening their own power. They have no leader, simply forming themselves into friendships or associations of convenience amongst their number, each sure in their own mind that the fewer they are, the better—both for safety and price. Only if one of their number is threatened—and bearing in mind their abilities, this is indeed very rare—do they come together fleetingly to protect their kind.

It is remarkable—or perhaps unsettling—to note that even with such potential power, the Uttering do not seek dominance. This curious fact, if it could be proved, might lead some, as it has in the wise, to conjecture that with true knowledge comes either absolute contentment or unending and relentless despair. Surely those who have mastered the arts know every secret ever given voice, every oath or curse or joy or whisper of love. What might be the temptations of those with such power?

And what might be revealed.

ADVENTURES IN THESE LOCATIONS

These locations are given to add even more curiosity to the streets of the City of Brass and to enable you to spin a few adventures or encounters—or simply color—to the setting. Each enables you to weave plots and tales into adventures or base those adventures on the locales above:

- The Heralds of the Fiery Bride offer a more overt danger, possibly spanning an adventure path, seeking out clues to bring their god to life. The PCs may be drawn in initially by encountering those who serve the salamanders or even salamanders who fear their own kin. What lurks in the temples beneath the Maw? If you like your adventures a little Lovecraftian, the link between stars and Maw could bring your PCs into contact with occult references, scalded or burnt libraries that give up terrible secrets in the binding of the great marriage of elementals. The Scalded Queen seeks ever more obscure secrets, her agents attacking the great libraries of the city. Perhaps, at first, her agents' actions are deemed as mad vandalism, arsonists bent on the destruction of arcane power for all time. Yet soon, the selective and peculiar nature of these attacks is deduced as something darker. The stars are aligning and some dark ritual said to have birthed the Maw in the first place is whispered of again.
- The Temple of Baal offers a great focus for a campaign, a much loathed yet much visited location in the City of Brass. Presently, the oddly benevolent Visionary seeks a dragonkin as his heir, yet that heir cannot be found by his followers. Could

it be that eyes less given to worshipping Baal might be more successful in finding the chosen one? An adventure or even an adventure path where an innocent is trapped by their own fate gives you an interesting option. The dragonkin might not want to be the chosen one, but those who seek them know better. They are pivotal in a terrible coming event that threatens not only the City of Brass but perhaps the fabric of creation. Possibly this dragonkin child harnesses arcane strength that will be needed to defeat whatever calamity approaches? Maybe there is a race against time against those also bent upon the destruction of the city. The monks lack the numbers and wit to secure the child, so agents (the PCs) are sent out to seek them out, but of course, the child doesn't want to be found. Do the PCs look the part of villains in what they seek to achieve? Finally, what event comes? Is the peculiar temple the focus of the ultimate events? Is the reason for its formation explained as it becomes the center of the adventure path where a final battle occurs? Does the eventual death of the Visionary herald some celestial event that unravels the fiery city? (Perhaps our first two locations have more in common than even we thought? Could the one exist to destroy the other?)

- The Ways could make a great single use location in your adventures, passed through by necessity perhaps or maybe the only way to reach a certain desired locale or dungeon complex. Who would hide in such a place, or who would use the fickle children to move about the city, perhaps risking all by doing so? Certainly the thieves' guilds would pay dearly to have a guide or someone who understands the Ways. Are the PCs asked to release a prisoner only to find as they near the end of the adventure the entire area about them unravelling into the knotted madness of the Ways as the prisoner makes good their escape anyway? Is the mission simpler? Perhaps minotaurs face some dread attack that is poisoning the mother of the Ways against her children with the PCs facing adventure in the twisting madness that would drive any minotaur insane.
- Finally, our Uttering. What power would such magic hold? Surely its secrets must attract envy. Suppose one of its order was under the power of someone (or thing) wicked. To even think of such an event, trickery or the ability to mask such magic would be needed. Our villain, therefore, may be a powerful wizard once rejected by the group or thrown out due to some foul transgression. Can this caster manipulate the magic to make the words false or to infest the minds of those linked to the curious arcana, thus making them turn to strangers for help? Surely associating with such terrible power would bring dire warnings from the PCs' friends and allies, and what power might the end villain have if they can hear all words? Might they not seemingly be able to thwart and menace the PCs at every turn, knowing almost everything they know?

We hope you find these settings are useful or at least give you a few little morsels for thought in planning your own adventures and locations. The City of Brass is almost endless, as are its possibilities.

THIS WAY TO THE CITY OF BRASS

by Steve Winter

Of all the infinite locations outside the Material Plane, the most iconic may well be the City of Brass. It's the type of place where any GM would love to set an adventure and where most adventurers would love to wander. Still, they need a good reason to go there; bold adventurers don't travel as tourists.

Any of these hooks can be used to push, pull, or drop characters into the Plane of Elemental Fire and the legendary City of Brass. Here, they're grouped into three categories based on which approach they take: pushing, pulling, or dropping.

Pushes

A push-type hook is one that has its roots outside the Plane of Elemental Fire, but for one or more reasons, characters can't accomplish their objective without visiting the City of Brass. Many of these involve the characters being hired or otherwise employed to visit the City of Brass for some specific reason:

1. The characters' patron has a message or an item that must be delivered to a specific creature in the City of Brass. The recipient is either difficult to find or difficult to get an audience with. As a variant, the "package" for delivery is another sentient creature who doesn't want to be handed over.
2. The City of Brass is protected against the searing heat of the Plane of Elemental Fire, so it's more hospitable to creatures not native to the plane than are the surrounding environs. The characters' patron wants to know how that astounding feat is accomplished.
3. The characters were put in charge of safeguarding an especially valuable item or location while its owner was away. An efreeti showed up, caused all sorts of havoc and destruction, stole the item, and fled with it back to the Plane of Elemental Fire. To fulfill their obligation, the characters need to get it back.
4. A powerful individual or consortium wants to know more about the defenses and military strength of the grand sultan. The characters are sent to the City of Brass under cover of being traders or diplomats to scout the city's defenses. They must get into areas that outsiders are barred from entering and assess the strength of the grand sultan's preparations. Alternatively, the characters could be sent to learn the ins and outs of efreeti customs and etiquette in preparation for a major diplomatic mission from the Material Plane.

5. Someone is stirring up trouble between efreeti and mortals, breaking generations-old agreements in ways that offend or harm both sides. No one knows who's behind these outrages or why, but unless they're stopped, war may result. The characters' patron believes the answer can be found in the back alleys and discontented underbelly of the City of Brass. Characters may be able to call on limited aid from the grand sultan to uncover the culprits, but the pashas can't be seen taking sides with mortals against their own subjects.

6. Emissaries of the efreeti contacted the characters' patron with a message that they have a delicate task for a group of mortals who broadly fit the party's description. When characters arrive in the City of Brass, efreeti emissaries "recognize" the characters as the subjects of an ancient efreeti prophecy on which the fate of the city depends.

Pulls

A pull-type hook is one that has its roots in the City of Brass. The adventure doesn't necessarily start there, but that's where it's likely to end:

1. Characters are on the trail of an infamous and powerful criminal, and indications point to him having fled to the City of Brass. Characters must bring him back to the material world for justice and smooth over any uproar he causes in the Plane of Elemental Fire.
2. A vital ritual can be completed only with flame from the Burning Palace of the Grand Sultan. The grand sultan doesn't normally allow this flame to be taken out of his palace, so characters must infiltrate and steal it and then escape back to their own realm with the flame still lit.
3. At the end of a long adventure to capture a dangerous artifact, characters learn that it can be destroyed only in a sacred pillar of flame in the City of Brass—but doing so will also extinguish the flame.
4. A request for help has been received across dimensions. The grand sultan wants one of his own kind eliminated or punished, but for inscrutable legal or political reasons, the dirty deed can't be done by other efreet. The characters' patron is a longtime ally of the efreeti, so he offers the job to them.
5. Love survives across dimensions! The NPC spouse or lover of one of the characters disappears into the City of Brass. The NPC might have been kidnapped by an efreeti who's in love with the same person, for revenge against the characters, or the NPC might have left voluntarily to escape from what he or she now sees as a dead-end relationship.
6. A portal to the Plane of Elemental Fire has opened in town and fire elementals are coming through, causing raging conflagrations. Characters must deal with the elementals, travel through the portal to the City of Brass, find a way to close it from other side, and then find a way back home without the portal.

Drops

A drop-type hook is one that doesn't give the characters much choice. They're going to the City of Brass whether or not they want to:

1. A magic portal, a *teleportation* spell, or some other means of instantaneous travel goes haywire. Instead of arriving at their expected destination, the characters suddenly find themselves in the City of Brass without the means to turn around and jaunt back home.
2. A large building the characters are staying in—an aristocrat's palace or a major inn, for example—catches fire during the night. Try as they might to escape, the characters find themselves completely hemmed in by roaring flames. As the flames and heat wash over them, the characters expect only a horrible death, but when they open their eyes, they find themselves alive by some miracle and in the City of Brass.
3. The characters just pulled off a tremendously successful tomb-looting expedition. As they sift through the heap

of well-earned treasure, they find a sealed crystal bottle that contains an efreeti. After a tough negotiation for their three wishes, they unstopper the vial and release its prisoner—who immediately reneges on all his promises and magically transports everyone to the City of Brass.

4. The characters are passengers on a sailing ship, looking forward to an uneventful crossing. Another passenger, however, has brought an efreeti bottle aboard and, at some point, opens it. The efreeti kills the bottle's owner and attacks whoever else it finds aboard. When characters and other passengers finally have the enraged efreeti cornered and at death's door, it triggers a failsafe magical effect that hijacks the ship and all its contents to the City of Brass.
5. Characters find themselves sharing an inn's common room with an efreeti disguised as a dragonkin. Without realizing their companion's true nature, the characters say or do something that offends its rigorous sense of honor or etiquette. No efreeti would put up with such an affront, so it transports them to the City of Brass and locks them in the dungeon of its fiery home.
6. Someone or something in the City of Brass casts the efreeti's version of a *conjure mortals* spell, and the player characters were the unlucky creatures pulled through the ether to perform a short term of service in the Plane of Elemental Fire.

What a Twist!

Any hook can be spiced up with an unexpected twist. To add a peculiarity to any hook, roll 1d6:

1. The characters are somehow stuck with a demon as an ally.
2. Characters must accomplish their objective without killing anyone.
3. The patron who brought them in on this mission actually wants them to fail.
4. If the mission succeeds, innocent people will be hurt by it.
5. While in the City of Brass, characters are mistaken for another, similar group of mortals who caused a lot of trouble recently.
6. The actual goal is very different from what characters were told. Their patron concocted an elaborate story to get them to bring a specific item into the Burning Palace where it will magically transform into a powerful killer bent on assassinating the grand sultan. Unless characters stop it, they'll wind up with the blame.

BAZAAR OF INEFFABLE WONDERS

by Richard Green

***Author's Note.** Parts of this article are taken from the Nine Chthonic Papyri of Heknusret the Temerarious, former member of the Honorable Society of Portal Wizards, a secretive order of Nurian mages based in the city of Per-Anu who seek to control the mysterious Red Portals.*

Heknusret travelled through dozens of Red Portals to many different times, places, and worlds, often with little regard for his own safety, meticulously recording his discoveries in a collection of scrolls known as the *Chthonic Papyri* which he kept in a leather scroll case embossed with the symbols of Anu-Akma, Lord of the Underworld—a golden ankh and scythe.

Heknusret was expelled from the society for his failure to safeguard the secrets of the portal wizards when his scroll case was stolen during a visit to the River King's Court in the Arbonesse. Copies of the *Chthonic Papyri* have since appeared for sale in markets of cities such as Bemmea and Mhalmet and always fetch astronomical prices. But owning these scrolls is dangerous—the portal wizards actively hunt and eliminate anyone in possession of their lore who is not a member of the society.

A Visit to the Bazaar

A number of Red Portals lead to the fabled City of Brass, but I have always found the most reliable to be the one located in Kel Azjer, the hidden city of the Tamasheq. Head east from the Plaza of the Aeromancer along the Street of Amphorae until you come to a small temple with a cobalt dome. There is a brass plate on its wooden door depicting an armored knight mounted on a war camel. Rub the nail set in the rider's navel twelve times to open the portal.

Step through the glowing red doorway, and you will find yourself on the bustling streets of one of the greatest cities in the multiverse—the City of Brass, home to the efreeti and their powerful grand sultan. The city is rightly famed across the planes for its markets, bazaars, and souks. Here, a visitor can find many wondrous things available for sale. The trick is knowing where to look.

One promising spot where I have made a number of worthwhile purchases over the years is the Bazaar of Ineffable Wonders, a splendid covered market on the banks of the Incandescent Canal, not far from the Blazing Mosque. The bazaar is built from basalt in the shape of a giant cross—each section is over 300 yards long and can be entered through one of four impressive gates.

The bazaar's roof is topped with a series of copper domes adorned with gold filigree, and rectangular windows high in the walls bath the interior in the eerie, red light of the Plane of Elemental Fire. At the central point, where the four arms of the cross meet, is a much larger dome; the inside of this impressive cupola is decorated with a spectacular mosaic of gold and glass tesserae of dazzling colors, depicting the Grand Sultan Ixingaltrix holding court in his throne room as the other genie lords prostrate themselves before him.

The Bazaar of Ineffable Wonders holds over 500 shops, selling all manner of marvelous things, many of which I have only ever seen for sale here. As they are in the Southlands, shops selling similar goods are often clustered together, making it hard to find the particular establishment you seek. As you wander through the bazaar, the heady smells of incense, tobacco, and roasting meats merge with the pungent aromas of exotic spices, herbs, and oils. There are magical items to buy here, of course, but there are mechanical wonders too, and a visitor in search of a beautiful carpet, a finely wrought weapon, or a rare tome will not leave disappointed.

MUBARAK'S EMPORIUM OF MECHANICAL MARVELS

Whenever I visit the bazaar, I make a point of stopping at Mubarak's Emporium to see his newest clockwork inventions. Like most shops in the bazaar, Mubarak's is packed with merchandise, its contents spilling out into the walkway. Larger mechanicals, including a clockwork steed and a bronze scorpion, stand outside while the shelves and display cases inside are filled with all manner of smaller, more intricate items.

Mubarak al-Hariq, an irascible azer clockwork mage, runs the emporium and crafts everything for sale here himself. He makes his bigger pieces in a workshop elsewhere in the city but builds the smaller clockworks right in the shop, and I usually find him tinkering with some kind of mechanism or other on his workbench whenever I visit. Abdul, a mechanical monkey, acts as his assistant, fetching tools, gears, and screws from a cabinet with many small drawers. Occasionally he produces the wrong item, prompting a frustrated Mubarak to swear colorfully at him in Ignan.

Mubarak greets new customers with suspicion and a scowl but is the most talented clockworker I have ever met, and he talks animatedly with those who know and appreciate clockwork magic and automata. If you are looking for a mechanical helper or clockwork gadget, this is the place to come.

MUBARAK AL-HARIQ

(Azer Clockwork Mage)

Medium elemental, neutral evil

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points 91 (14d8 + 28)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	12 (+1)	15 (+2)	20 (+5)	13 (+1)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Con +6, Int +9, Wis +5

Skills Arcana +9, Religion +9

Damage Immunities fire, poison

Condition Immunities poisoned

Senses passive Perception 15

Languages Ignan

Challenge 10 (5,900 XP)

Clockworker's Charm. Whenever Mubarak casts *animate construct*, the duration of the spell is increased by 4 minutes.

Golem Form. Mubarak can transform himself into a golem or clockwork creature of CR 10 or less for up to 10 minutes. He retains his Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma and the ability to speak and cast spells. Otherwise, this functions as the druid's Wild Shape ability.

Heated Body. A creature that touches Mubarak or hits him with a melee attack while within 5 feet of him takes 5 (1d10) fire damage.

Heated Weapons. When Mubarak hits with a metal melee weapon, he deals an extra 3 (1d6) fire damage (included in the attack).

Illumination: Mubarak sheds bright light in a 10-foot radius and dim light for an additional 10 feet.

Spellcasting. Mubarak is a 14th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 17, +9 to hit with spell attacks). He has the following wizard spells prepared:

- **Cantrips (at will)**: *fist of iron*, light, mage hand, mending, tick stop**
- **1st level (4 slots)**: *animate construct*, burning hands, gear shield* machine speech**
- **2nd level (3 slots)**: *gear barrage*, shatter, winding key**
- **3rd level (3 slots)**: *dispel magic, overclock*, thousand darts**
- **4th level (3 slots)**: *absolute command*, dimension door, grinding gears*, steam blast**
- **5th level (2 slots)**: *animate objects, mechanical union**
- **6th level (1 slot)**: *catapult*, chain lightning*
- **7th level (1 slot)**: *reverse gravity*

*Clockwork spell (see *Midgard Heroes Handbook*)

ACTIONS

Command Construct. One construct that Mubarak can see within 60 feet must succeed on a DC 17 Intelligence saving throw or become friendly to the mage and obey his commands. This effect lasts for 1 hour, until the mage uses this ability again, or until the construct takes damage from Mubarak or his allies. If the saving throw is failed by 5 or more, the duration is extended to 6 hours or until one of the other conditions is fulfilled. When the effect ends, the construct is aware it was controlled by Mubarak.

Hammer. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) bludgeoning damage, or 8 (1d10 + 3) bludgeoning damage if used with two hands to make a melee attack, plus 3 (1d6) fire damage.

Mubarak al-Hariq has lived in the City of Brass for over a century. Like most azer, he dislikes the efreeti who make up the majority of his customers, but he doesn't much care for humans either, preferring the company of his clockwork "friends."

Already a master of his craft, Mubarak spends his time constantly inventing new clockwork devices and automata. Some of these constructs and gizmos are dangerous or unpredictable, but this doesn't concern Mubarak. The azer can call upon several clockwork creatures, including clockwork hounds and myrmidons (see *Tome of Beasts*), to defend his shop from robbers or other troublemakers.

Adventure Hooks

There's always a lot happening in the bazaar:

- Mubarak sold an ornithopter for a huge price to Mushir Faruq Mutakabbir, an influential efreeti noble, but regrettably he has not yet received payment. The azer plans to visit the great duke to raise the matter and is looking to hire a group of impressive bodyguards to accompany him.
- Irfan al-Zarqa, wealthy sybarite and friend of the Sultan of Siwal, solved an ancient, bronze puzzle box said to open a portal to a "realm of ultimate sensation." Irfan is now trapped in this other dimension and the sultan would like his friend back. Can Mubarak reopen the puzzle box, so the PCs can mount a rescue mission?
- An elderly fire jinnborn named Saffiyah al-Razzaq purchased a clockwork device from Mubarak designed to slow the aging process. When she took the spider-shaped contraption home, it attached itself to her arm, piercing her skin with its needle-like legs. She immediately felt healthier and stronger, and the wrinkles on her face faded away. The drawback is that she must drain the vitality of the young every night to power the device. Now she is stalking innocent victims throughout the city, leaving shriveled husks in her wake. Can the PCs put an end to the killings and confront Mubarak who has several more of these devices for sale?

Other Notable Shops

In my visits to the bazaar over the years, a lot of establishments have come and gone, but these have stood the test of time, becoming beloved institutions with a loyal clientele.

Char and Scorch are a pair of dim-witted magma mephits that run the **Big Grill**, a place selling a wide variety of smoked and barbecued meats—everything from auroch and giant elk to roasted gorgon and purple worm steaks. The meat is generally served very well done and is coated with a nearly inedible spicy glaze made with very hot infernal chilies (DC 18 Constitution saving throw or become poisoned for one minute, save ends).

Hook—A regular efreeti customer has demanded a unicorn steak pita for tomorrow's lunch and the two mephits have no idea where to source the meat from. Are the PCs willing to help?

Bel'shun's Smoker's Paradise is a shop selling all manner of sweet-smelling tobaccos and exotic incense, many of which have magical properties, as well as beautifully made water pipes sized for humans, efreeti, and fire giants. Bel'shun is a fire jinnborn whose powerful jinn patron lives in an opulent mansion in the smartest part of the city. Bel'shun has brick red skin, golden hair, and a long aquiline nose; he dresses in a djellaba of crimson silk adorned with gold coins and other trinkets. His deep black eyes flicker with a blue flame when he is nervous.

Hook—One of Bel'shun's customers experienced a strange vision in which the PCs appeared, battling an angry genie whom they had inadvertently freed from a copper urn.

The Shackle Shop specializes in unbreakable chains, iron slave collars, bronze manacles, and branding irons marked with the sigils of efreeti noble houses—everything a cruel overseer needs to keep their slaves in line. Lysandrix, a salamander and former efreeti slave, was given his freedom by his master after three decades of loyal service. He set up this shop in the bazaar and made money off the misery of his kin and wretched humanoids. Lysandrix's forge work is of superior quality: the DC to break one of his chains or pick the lock of his manacles is 10 higher than normal.

Hook—Lysandrix's sister is still a slave, and the salamander's former master has ignored his pleas to grant her freedom. Lysandrix offers the PCs a set of magical *dimensional shackles* as a reward for sneaking into the efreeti's estate and unlocking his sister's manacles with the key he provides.

Pyramids of Spice is an aptly named shop near the Brimstone Gate, one of the bazaar's four entrances. Dozens of brightly colored mounds of different spices, herbs, and teas sit in wooden trays on the tables filling this shop. The owner is a red-scaled, fire-breathing dragonkin named Ansa Khetek, a spice merchant originally from the Southlands of Midgard who came to the City of Brass twelve years ago to trade in exotic chili peppers, saw an opportunity, and never left. Ansa sells her wares to some of the city's finest restaurants and wealthiest efreeti nobles, including the grand sultan himself. She has an incredible sense of smell and ironclad (but also very refined) taste buds.

Hook—The last batch of infernal chilies Ansa purchased from her supplier was not hot enough, and her customers are complaining. She needs a fresh batch urgently and is willing to pay the PCs a hefty fee if they will fetch her some from the Eleven Hells.

Marvelous Mechanicals and Other Wonders

PCs visiting the bazaar in search of unusual items should not be disappointed. Here is a sample of the merchandise available.

CLOCKWORK MONKEY

Wondrous item, rare

Built by Mubarak al-Hariq—who uses one of these mechanical monkeys as a helper in his workshop—it is fashioned from copper and stands about a foot tall, wearing a little felt fez atop its metal head. The monkey is friendly to you and your companions and obeys your spoken commands. If you issue no commands, the monkey amuses itself by dancing and capering on the spot or hanging from a lamp fitting with its tail.

CLOCKWORK MONKEY

Tiny construct, unaligned

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points 2 (1d4)

Speed 20 ft., climb 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)	9 (−1)	8 (−1)	8 (−1)

Skills Acrobatics +7, Athletics +2, Sleight of Hand +5

Damage Immunities poison, psychic

Condition Immunities exhaustion, poisoned

Senses passive Perception 9

Languages understands Ignan

Challenge 0 (10 XP)

Expert Lockpicker. The clockwork monkey has expertise with thieves' tools (+7).

Immutable Form. The clockwork monkey is immune to any spell or effect that would alter its form.

Magic Resistance. The clockwork monkey has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

ACTIONS

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +1 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 2 (1d4) piercing damage.

CLOCKWORK MYNAH BIRD

Wondrous item, rare

Another Mubarak al-Hariq creation, this mechanical brass bird is nine inches long from the tip of its beak to the end of its tail. If you use your action to speak the first command word ("listen" in Ignan), it cocks its head and listen intently to what is being said for up to 10 minutes. When you give the second command word ("speak"), it will repeat back what it has heard in a metallic-sounding—though reasonably accurate—portrayal of the speakers' voices.

You can use the clockwork mynah bird to relay conversations it has heard to others. You can command the mynah to fly to a location it has previously visited, where your friend or contact can use the command word to get it to repeat back what it has heard. The mynah bird returns to you as soon as it has carried out this task.

The clockwork mynah bird has AC 14, 1 hp, and a fly speed of 50 ft.

INCENSE OF RECOVERY

Wondrous item, rare

This block of perfumed incense appears to be normal, nonmagical incense until lit. The incense burns for one hour and gives off a lavender-like scent, accompanied by pale mauve smoke. If you are a spellcaster, you can recover a single expended spell slot following a short rest that takes place while the incense is burning.

SHEESHAH OF REVELATIONS

Wondrous item, rare (requires attunement)

This finely crafted water pipe is made from silver and glass. Its vase is etched with arcane symbols. When you use the sheeshah to smoke normal or flavored tobacco, you enter a dreamlike state and are granted a cryptic or surreal vision giving you insight into your current quest or a significant event in your near future. The GM will describe your vision to you.

Using the *sheeshah of revelations* is physically taxing. You emerge from the dreamlike state with a level of exhaustion. You cannot use the sheeshah again until the events hinted at in your vision have come to pass.

SPICE BOX OF ZEST

Wondrous item, very rare

This small, square wooden box is carved with scenes of life in the City of Brass. Inside, the box is divided into six compartments, each holding a different magical spice. A small wooden spoon is also stored inside the box for measuring. A spice box of zest contains six spoonfuls of each spice when full.

You can add one spoonful of a single spice per person to a meal that you or someone else is cooking. If you add two or more spices, a culinary mishap may ensue.

The spices have the following effects on those consuming the meal and last for one hour unless otherwise indicated:

Baharat—Your Strength score increases to 21.

Cassia—You are no longer suffering the effects of exhaustion.

Cloves—You cannot become frightened.

Fiery Chilies—You can use a bonus action to exhale fire in a 15-foot cone. The target must make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw or take 3d6 fire damage on a failed save or half damage on a successful one. The effect ends after you have used your fiery breath or after one hour, whichever comes first.

- *Saffron*—You become charmed by the next creature you see 10 minutes after eating the meal. If the creature is of a species and gender you are normally attracted to, you regard it as your true love while you are charmed.
- *Turmeric*—You have advantage on saving throws against spells.

THE WENDESTAL DEVIL

by Chris Harris

The principalities of Morgau and Doresh fell under the control of the vampiric Prince Lucan some three hundred years ago, condemning the people of those lands to lives of horror so constant that most have grown numb to the mundane fears which plague ordinary people elsewhere. Since taking power, Lucan, now styling himself a king, has tripled the lands under his sway, spreading the undead nightmare of his reign north to the shores of the Reaver Coast and the Bay of Ghed.

Though the armies of Morgau and Doresh, now called the Blood Kingdom, spend little effort expanding eastward, few see the point in doing so. No permanent settlements of any real size stand to be conquered on the Rothenian Plain unless one counts Demon Mountain—which no one does. What wealth exists on the plains and steppes rests either in the hands of Khazzaki warriors who move constantly and live to make war, Kariv bands who offer little in the way of plunder but much in the way of sorcerous consequences, and wandering bands of centaurs willing to fight anything at all, sometimes for no discernible gain.

A Long History of Vampirism

Yet Lucan cannot be blamed for every nightmare in the region. Indeed, the lands between the Cloudwall Mountains, the Black Hills, and Grisal were no stranger to vampirism prior to his usurpation of power in Morgau and the spreading of his Shroud-Eaters across these lands. Though no one could conceive of the possibility of his terrible reign until it happened, the people of these lands were known for folklore and customs concerning the undead going back as far as history records, and the charms now proscribed by Lucan's edicts, which once protected them against those of the vampire's kind, were handed down from generation to generation for hundreds of years, if not longer.

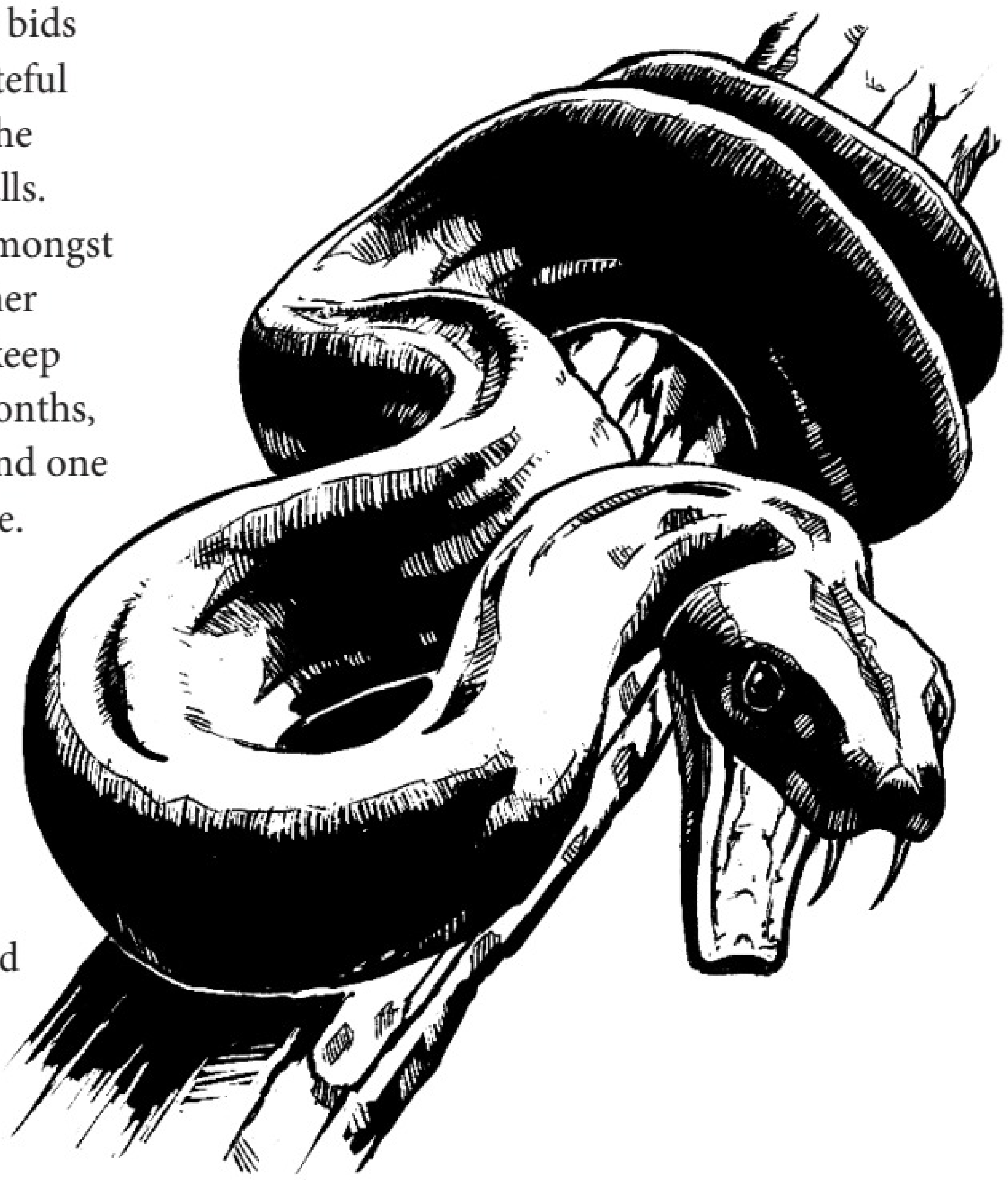
Some 350 years ago, at least one band of vampires, possibly more, haunted the edge of the farmland surrounding the Krakovan city of Lodezig, frustrating efforts to put an end to their predation by retreating to the foothills of the Cloudwall Mountains at the first sign of organized pursuit. The dark reputation of the mountain range usually wore down the courage of their pursuers long before their horses grew tired, and the few times courage won out, the mountains delivered on their dark promises. The first the Krakovars knew of the outcome of such hunts came at dawn in the following days when the rising sun revealed the scarecrows guarding their crops had lost their hats in the night and acquired blood-spattered Krakovar helmets in their places.

As the years passed, reports of vampiric attacks spread south from that region to include points all along the eastern foothills of the Cloudwalls. The southernmost remote communities to experience such predation were almost completely helpless to defend themselves, and the grisly process of insuring those who died from such attacks would not rise again became almost as routine as herding their cattle out to graze.

The Khazzaki people of the grass-covered expanse stretching from the Margreve Forest and the Cloudwalls to the fabled lands of Leng roiled like an angry hive of bees while Achaz the Horned attempted to consolidate his control over the Khazzaki khans 112 years ago. Those who chafed the most at the notion of a "Khan of Khans" took their warriors and families to the farthest edges of the lands that their people traditionally roamed, either to await the outcome or plot their own bids for power. One such khan made the fateful decision to winter with his people on the grasslands within sight of the Cloudwalls. There, he and his three sons debated amongst themselves and their lieutenants whether or not to swear loyalty to Achaz or to keep their distance. Over the cold, windy months, divided opinions led to sharp words, and one night the talk deteriorated into violence. The khan met his death at his own fireside, slain by his own trusted hetman, whose followers murdered the khan's most loyal warriors and spread throughout the camp to assert their control over their people. They met with sharp resistance led by two of the khan's sons, who had escaped the initial round of killings. The eldest remaining son fell soon after, but the youngest son, Matvei, fought his way free of the melee with his dead father's sword, and made for the darkness at the edge of camp, hoping to circle around outside the firelight to reach his horse.

Unbeknownst to the khan's son, many pairs of cold and ravenous eyes kept watch on the camp from the shadows on the plain, their bloodlust rising as the slaughter escalated before them. In Matvei's haste, he stumbled right into the waiting arms of one of the creatures who seized him in a steely grip and whirled him away from the others of its kind coming closer. The creature which grappled him hissed like a cat at its fellows and spoke, "The horse-princeling wishes to join our little family. Go and take his pursuers as you will, but let us not be rude to our new brother." A sharp pain in his throat, and his old life ended to the sound of war cries giving way to shrieks of surprise and terror.

The following night, Matvei awoke in an earthen burrow surrounded by his new, terrifying family, and the freedom he'd once known on the plains and steppes was lost to him for 50 years.



After picking off many of the survivors of the Khazzaki conflict over the next month, Matvei's new master returned to taking his coterie of vampires back and forth across the Cloudwalls according to whims he never bothered to explain. Those decades remain a painful blur of slaughter and dwindling hope as everything he once held dear, even his devotion to Svarog and the other gods of his people, proved lost to him or of no help. As time passed, he began to hate these things he once loved, his people and his gods, and as he and his companions fed on their prey, his resentment toward his own past devotions made those of all people seem fruitless and hateful. What good did these things do these hapless peasants when their lives were fated to end in order to extend his own pointless existence? Such people prayed at their country shrines and wove their charms against him, but neither of these things did more than prove a nuisance, and the gods lifted nary a finger to save them when their final moments came at his hands.

When those years of monotonous horror came to an end, he wasn't surprised. He'd long expected some trap would catch them overconfident and unaware. Neither was he shocked to find himself once again the sole survivor of a family, even one as wretched as his undead companions. What did surprise him, and so much so that he was nearly caught and destroyed several times soon after, was what killed his fellows and the reason why.

Matvei's master so rarely consulted his spawn beyond immediate tactical matters that whatever he knew of the world around them he kept largely to himself. Whatever awareness the old vampire had of Prince Lucan's reign and the expansion of his demesne he kept to himself. And whenever Lucan became aware of others like himself but independent and free of his own Tree of Chains, he sent hunters to track them down and destroy them. The destruction of Matvei's coterie was simply part of a last bit of "cleaning up," and the constant movement that kept them whole for so long had also kept them unaware of the extent of the danger coming their way.

The Rise of a Monster

Once Matvei escaped pursuit thoroughly enough to grant him time to think, he became outraged. His degenerate family, even though he bore them no love, died not for their crimes but because some greater monster would tolerate no competition even leagues from his home.

A combination of indignation and curiosity drove Matvei to spy on this kingdom of which he'd barely been aware. He took to stalking the wild places near the outskirts of civilization not simply to feed but to observe.

What he saw only made him angrier. He saw the grotesque aping these horrors made of the lifestyles of the soft nobles his Khazzaki forebears made such short work of, and though he had learned their capabilities the hard way, he could not shake his disgust at what he saw as a pretense. He watched the worship of Marena spread across the land and the barely concealed terror on the faces of expectant mothers visiting her temples, knowing as they must that one day the child they bore stood a fair chance of being drained to a husk by the very priestesses who ushered them into the world. He saw all of these things, and Matvei hated all of it.

To be sure, he had no real sympathy left in him for the peasant folk on whom he'd fed for so many years, and he continues to feed on them as he must to this day. However, his tastes have long since run to things he knows will cause panic and outrage, not among the simple folk but among their undead masters, and he kills far more often than necessary for his continued unlife. He prefers to feed on what mortal clergy he can find. Matvei also preys on the attendants and underlings of undead nobles whose habits leave them vulnerable. When opportunity has presented itself, he has destroyed a handful of vampiric nobles less powerful than himself, and he isn't above setting the odd fire on the off-chance of such a result.

Matvei also creates his own spawn only to abandon them immediately, hiding them in places where they rise confused and ravenous, and he revels in the chaos they cause before their destruction.

When hunted, he hides himself in places few would think to look, like the catacombs or the earth itself beneath the temples he has just offended or the hollow trees of abandoned sacred groves destroyed by Marena's devotees.

While most active in the Wendestal Forest, he maintains no permanent lair, viewing the notion as a death trap. His attacks have taken place as far east as Lengrove, north to the farmlands near the Commandery of Lost Souls, and south near the Blood Vaults.

Though speaking of his crimes is forbidden to the mortal peasantry, those west of the Cloudwalls whisper tales of the Wendestal Devil, named for the vast forest from which he often strikes. In the eastern foothills of that range, he is called the Lengrove Butcher after a series of grisly attacks close by.

MATVEI, THE WENDESTAL DEVIL

Medium undead (shapechanger), chaotic evil

Armor Class 18 (*+2 studded leather armor*)

Hit Points 187 (22d8 + 88)

Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	18 (+4)	18 (+4)	16 (+3)	18 (+4)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Dex +9, Wis +9, Cha +8

Skills Perception +9, Stealth +9

Damage Resistances necrotic; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 14

Languages Kariv, Khazzaki, Trade Tongue

Challenge 15 (13,000 XP)

Special Equipment. Matvei wields a *shashka of wounding*. He wears an *amulet of proof against detection and location* and a suit of *+2 studded leather armor*.

Shapechanger. If Matvei isn't in sunlight or running water, he can use his action to polymorph into a Tiny bat or a Medium cloud of mist or back into his true form.

While in bat form, Matvei can't speak, his walking speed is 5 feet, and he has a flying speed of 40 feet. His statistics, other than his size and speed, are unchanged. Anything he is wearing transforms with him, but nothing he is carrying does. Matvei reverts to his true form if he dies.

While in mist form, Matvei can't take any actions, speak, or manipulate objects. He is weightless, has a flying speed of 20 feet, can hover, and can enter a hostile creature's space and stop there. In addition, if air can pass through a space, the mist can do so without squeezing, and it can't pass through water. It has advantage on Strength, Dexterity, and Constitution saving throws, and it is immune to all nonmagical damage, except the damage it takes from sunlight.

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If Matvei fails a saving throw, he can choose to succeed instead.

Misty Escape. When he drops to 0 hit points outside his resting place, Matvei transforms into a cloud of mist (as in the Shapechanger trait) instead of falling unconscious, provided that he isn't in sunlight or running water. If he can't transform, he is destroyed.

While he has 0 hit points in mist form, he can't revert to his vampire form, and he must reach his resting place within 2 hours or be destroyed. Once in his resting place, he reverts to his vampire form. He is then paralyzed until he regains at least 1 hit point. After spending 1 hour in his resting place with 0 hit points, he regains 1 hit point.

Regeneration. Matvei regains 20 hp at the start of his turn if he has at least 1 hp and isn't in running water. If he takes radiant damage or damage from holy water, this trait doesn't function at the start of Matvei's next turn.

Spider Climb. Matvei can climb difficult surfaces, including upside down on ceilings, without needing to make an ability check.

Vampire Weaknesses. Matvei has the following flaws:

- *Forbiddance*. Matvei can't enter a residence without an invitation from one of the occupants.

- *Harmed by Running Water*. Matvei takes 20 acid damage if he ends his turn in running water.
- *Stake to the Heart*. If a piercing weapon made of wood is driven into Matvei's heart while he is incapacitated in his resting place, he is paralyzed until the stake is removed.

ACTIONS

Multiattack (Vampire Form Only). Matvei makes three attacks, only one of which can be a bite attack.

Shashka of Wounding (Vampire Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack*: +11 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 +4) slashing damage or 10 (1d12+4) slashing damage when used with two hands or while mounted.

Unarmed Strike (Vampire Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack*: +11 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) bludgeoning damage. Instead of dealing damage, Matvei can grapple the target (escape DC 18).

Bite (Bat or Vampire Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack*: +11 to hit, reach 5 ft., one willing creature, or a creature that is grappled by Matvei, incapacitated, or restrained. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage plus 14 (4d6) necrotic damage. The target's hit point maximum is reduced by an amount equal to the necrotic damage taken, and Matvei regains hit points equal to that amount. The reduction lasts until the target finishes a long rest. The target dies if this effect reduces its hit point maximum to 0. A humanoid slain in this way and then buried in the ground rises the following night as a vampire spawn under Matvei's control.

Charm. Matvei targets one humanoid he can see within 30 feet of it. If the target can see Matvei, the target must succeed on a DC 18 Wisdom saving throw against this magic or be charmed by him. The charmed target regards Matvei as a trusted friend to be heeded and protected. Although the target isn't under Matvei's control, it takes his requests or actions in the most favorable way it can, and it is a willing target for Matvei's bite attack.

Each time the vampire or the vampire's companions do anything harmful to the target, it can repeat the saving throw, ending the effect on itself on a success. Otherwise, the effect lasts 24 hours or until the vampire is destroyed, is on a different plane of existence than the target or takes a bonus action to end the effect.

Children of the Night (1/Day). Matvei magically calls 2d4 swarms of bats or rats, provided that the sun isn't up. While outdoors, Matvei can call 3d6 wolves instead. The called creatures arrive in 1d4 rounds, acting as Matvei's allies and obeying his spoken commands. The beasts remain for 1 hour, until Matvei dies, or until Matvei dismisses them as a bonus action.

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

Matvei can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. Matvei regains spent legendary actions at the start of his turn.

Move. Matvei moves up to its speed without provoking opportunity attacks.

Attack. Matvei makes one weapon attack, not including his bite attack.

Bite (Costs 2 Actions). Matvei makes one bite attack.

SHASHKA

Cost: 20 gp; ***Damage***: 1d8 slashing; **Weight**: 4 lb.; Properties: versatile (1d10), special (1d10 when wielded one-handed while mounted or two-handed on foot).

A cavalry saber employed to great effect by mounted Khazzaki warriors, the shashka can be swung while on horseback in a repeated, looping downward arc. When riding through enemy ranks, a Khazzaki employs a one-handed, whirling swing, crisscrossing the rider's pommel to strike at enemies on foot on both sides in a downward double arc. This method of mounted strike has made Khazzaki charges infamous for their unpredictability as the horse warriors may suddenly break to one side or the other in layered waves, the first chopping away at the spears meant to break their charge, and the following waves chopping into the enemies behind them, to be followed by a direct charge as the first waves clear the line. One observer described such a Khazzaki charge that turned near the last second and raced across instead of through the enemy line during hostilities with the tsar of Vidim 140 years ago as, "like a smith's grinding wheel applied to a block of cheese."

RECOLLECTIONS OF THE RIVER COURT

by Chris Harris

Yes, it's true! I have travelled far up the rivers that flow through the Arbonesse—all the way to the River Court. There I was taken on a tour of the place before being seated for dinner with the king himself, that secret keeper, Ulorian the First! Here, sit, I will recall my time there for you so that you might decide if such a trip is in your interest..

—Nenmaas Goodloaf (halfling of House Aunun)

The River Court is the last foothold of the elves in Midgard. Tucked away in the great forest of Arbonesse, the court's population comprises a few elves, many elfmarked, halflings, and a growing number of aquatic humanoids of various types. It is this last contingent of the court that makes it unique among the kingdoms of Midgard, for nowhere else are the waterborne fey so welcome as in King Ulorian's Court.

A NOTE ON ARCHITECTURE

The River Court is built both within the river Neurabon and on its saturated banks. The castle, with its towers and water gates, is built in the middle of the river, and a thick foam builds at the base of its walls where the swift water meets the stone. Entrance to the castle is made either through a gate facing upstream or via a heavily guarded walkway from shore.

The spires of the River Court are built near the castle. All, save for the Spire of Baccho, can be reached by water—even the library in the Spire of Memory is partially submerged.

The farms around Ulorian's castle are simple affairs and serve as home to most of the court's halflings as well as a number of elfmarked. The fields are well irrigated, and it's common for small aquatic fey to travel up the canals and make their homes in their banks—even assisting with the harvest when time.

Darker things also dwell in the court. Creatures whose natural abilities lie in the domain of subterfuge and spying. King Ulorian welcomes these creatures as subjects, and it's through them that he maintains advantage over his enemies and allies alike.

The Five Spires of the River Court

The spires of the court are simply stunning. They are surprisingly hard to see from the nearby forest, a fact I must attribute to the magic of the place. Though why his majesty would wish to hide these splendors is beyond me! Alabaster white with golden trim, they rise like majestic fingers pointing to the stars. Each is built upon some important edifice, and I'm told there are chambers at the tops—though no one would tell me what is kept there…

The interiors of the buildings of the River Court are designed to offer comfort to those aquatic fey who live there. Many chambers are partially submerged, and their walls drip with cool condensation. Despite being lavishly decorated with polished river stones, gilded archways, and beautiful hanging water plants (that bloom eternally in the presence of King Ulorian), the buildings of the River Court are cold and wet and uncomfortable to those not suited to the water.

SPIRE OF CURRENTS

The Spire of Currents is built upon the elves' main woodworking shop. Though the crafters produce mundane goods such as furniture and tableware, the workshop is chiefly known for its production of river barges. The crafters are led by Uynitia Boughbender, an elfmarked woman whose arms were maimed in battle and replaced with magical wooden facsimiles that move at her command.

The workshop at the base of the spire opens onto the river where old and damaged barges are delivered and new ones set afloat. Despite the labor transpiring in the shop, a meditative silence is all that is heard, though occasionally songs or laughter drift from the gate.

The spire is accessible via the workshop, but its doors are locked and warded against simple magic. Only Uynitia has the key to the spire, which she keeps on a silver chain around her neck at all times. The spire reaches three hundred feet into the air and has a single windowless staircase that rises from the workshop to its peak.

The topmost chamber of the spire is a small room painted in gold. It has a round window that faces south and is framed in rough-cut pieces of wood from the forest. In the center of the room is the broken prow of the first riverboat built by the Court. Broken and splintered, the boat yet contains powerful elvish magic. Several simple pillows sit on the floor around the prow, and those who sit there are filled with visions depicting elvish wood crafting techniques. To be invited to sit with the broken prow is a high honor.

SPIRE OF MEMORY

The River Court's principal library is built near the castle and is commonly referred to as the Spire of Memory. It consists of three main chambers connected by short, highly decorated corridors. The chambers are well lit by beautiful and magical stained-glass windows whose animated scenes depict the history of the court. The library is managed by three elven scholars (Nilia, Sarion, and Fenn) who oversee a small staff of elfmarked and halfling workers.

The library has representatives who travel throughout Midgard searching for books to add to the spire's impressive collection. These are mostly elfmarked scholars accompanied by well-paid mercenaries. The scholars of the River Court are often found combing through old ruins in pursuit of lost knowledge.

The three chambers of the spire are heavily guarded, and access to the stairs leading to its top is restricted to the three head librarians. A spiraling staircase leads from one of the library's chambers to the top of the spire. The spire rises two hundred feet, and the walls along this staircase are covered in elvish writing: poems, ballads, expressions—all written in the same steady silver script.

The topmost chamber of the Spire of Memories contains a simple bookshelf filled with the rarest and most magical tomes kept by the River Court. Only those who have earned the favor of the court may hope to open these rarest of books.

SPIRE OF UNITY

Though the River Court's population is small (estimated around 3,800), it's surprisingly varied. Elves, elfmarked, halflings, and all manner of fey (especially aquatic) all live together peacefully. Though the court's reputation suggests it is the home of exiles and outsiders, those who dwell within its limits are far from hermits living lives of solitude. The Spire of Unity consists of a grand feast hall. Half the hall is submerged in the cold water of the river while the other half sits on sturdy stone. A wooden common table runs through the hall—one end dips into the water. Chairs made from curved driftwood line the tables.

For those subjects of the court who prefer their meals cooked, as opposed to raw and fresh from the river, a stone stove sits at the dry end of the hall. It is said that the bones from fish cooked on the stove regrow their flesh when cast in the river, so it is common to see piles of such bones in the watery portion of the hall after a large feast.

SPIRE OF BACCHO

This spire is built upon a large wine-storage vault dug deep under the riverbank's wet, clay-filled soil. The vault has two dimly lit chambers connected by a short corridor and tasting room. Ornately carved wooden storage racks form aisles and line the walls of both chambers. One chamber is for wines that have aged up to sixty years while the other chamber is reserved for vintages bottled as far back as two hundred years. The entrance to the wine vault is heavily guarded due to the large amount of enchanted wine stored inside.

The spire is accessed via a spiraling staircase built atop the entrance to the vault. It rises for a hundred feet above the ground and is topped by a small chamber magically locked and warded. Inside the top chamber, which is windowless and kept cool by permanent spells, is a glass display case containing a few grapes from the very first harvest by the elves of the River Court. The grapes are said to be blessed by Baccho and possess powerful magic.

SPIRE OF CHARUN

This tallest spire in the River Court is the Spire of Charun. It sits upon the temple of Charun, a large boat-shaped building made from dressed stone and finely carved wood. The temple resembles a river barge with its primary entrance in the aft section and the altar placed near the prow. Wooden benches, carved with depictions of the Boatman ushering the elves to and from the heavens, form rows along the length of the main chamber. Windows, shaped like ornate lanterns, line the walls allowing muted light into the space.

The spire is accessed behind the altar via a spiraling staircase lit with sacred lanterns. It rises two hundred feet above the temple to a worshipping space reserved for special ceremonies. Few have been allowed to enter the top of the spire, and those who have do not speak of it. Rumors that it contains a portal capable of accessing every plane of existence are unsubstantiated.

The Alabaster Gates

It was on my tour of the castle proper that I saw the twin gates said to offer direct passage to Elfheim itself! Though the gates appeared only to lead to the other side of the room when I spied them. Still, I could sense the magic in those snow-white frames as I was hurried on.

Last of the true elfroads in Midgard, the Alabaster Gates of the River Court allow accepted travelers to step from the middle world to the luminous land of the elves: Elfheim. The King of the River Court alone has the ability to activate the gates, which sit in well-guarded buildings inside the castle's courtyard. Though the mode through which the gates are activated is a well-kept secret, many scholars suspect the king's crown is the key; its observed properties suggest that the crown exists in both Midgard and Elfheim at the same time and that its magic is the source of some of the king's more powerful abilities.

The gates themselves are made from purest white stone interwoven with pale wood set to give the appearance of water flowing upward from the ground. The gates are fifteen feet tall and ten feet wide, and emit a constant warmth—like stone heated in the sun.

The Wineries of the River Court

Of all the secrets revealed to me in my time in the River Court, it was the wineries that stroked my sense of wonder the most. Though I must admit, there is also something inexplicably dreadful about those strange groves whose ebon grapes grow on vines that strangle the trees.

The Neurabon river winds through the Arbonesse, feeding streams, lakes, and ponds along the way. The land along its banks is rich and fertile, and the members of the River Court have taken advantage of this fact. The variety of grape grown under the dense canopy requires little sunlight; a trait which defies the natural world and is a product of the king's magic. The vines of these plump grapes, whose midnight flesh is sweet and overwhelming, grow around the trees and shrubs of the forest; they wind tightly around their hosts, making deep impressions in the bark.

The grapes are harvested by halflings who climb here and there to collect the grapes. These workers pride themselves in the careful manner with which they pluck the grapes—rarely is one piece of fruit wasted.

The wine is produced in two sturdy stone and wood buildings built near the groves. As with all the structures of the River Court, the buildings are accessible by both land and water. Inside, the grapes are crushed and stomped by mischievous water spirits and small aquatic fey who dance and sing old songs together, washing themselves in the river when their appendages becomes too stained.

The River Court produces two wines. One, which they export to Dornig and beyond, is strong and sweet and best drunk with a hearty meal. The other, which is bottled and stored in racks deep underneath the Neurabon, is enchanted with the king's magic and is reserved for members of the court.

The Theatre of Drowned Stars

My eyes widened when I was escorted to the edge of a great whirlpool near the castle. The water of the Neurabon swirled and frothed, and I admit to terror as it was suggested I simply throw myself into the vortex. Not wanting to appear rude and with uncertainty over the cleanliness of my drawers afterward, I leapt into the whirlpool. Against my expectations, I emerged in a stone and clay chamber under the river. The walls of the place were lit with beautiful glowing blooms, and I was led then into the Theatre of Drowned Stars where I had a delightful night.

Below the castle and accessed by a magical whirlpool on the banks of the river is the River Court's amphitheater. Named for the magical blooms that illuminate the walls and ceiling of the theater, the Theater of Drowned Stars hosts weekly performances by a rotating cast of poets, actors, singers, and orators.

The theater is built in the round and is oval shaped. Stone benches form rows around the central stage, which is made from enchanted clay. There is never a need for sets to be built for the theater's performances as the clay can be molded, carved, and magically commanded to change its shape.

The principal master of ceremonies for these performances is a **boloti** (*Tome of Beasts*) named Prince Suss who travels on a magical wave of water that occasionally topples. Prince Suss is an impressive speaker and charming host who loves to cast *fog cloud* before making an appearance.

Celebrities of the Court

Enetha Senbloom, High Priest of Charun. Enetha (N elf female, 8th-level Storm Domain Cleric) is a tall, pale woman whose robe is made of undulating river plants. The cowl of her robe is made entirely of shaped, black water, which shadows her face and lends a trickling quality to her speech. The high priest spends most of her time in the Spire of Charun where she gives sermons and counsels the court's membership. She travels the Neurabon on a riverboat made from the bones of those enemies of the court who drowned.

Gibbers Crane, Master of the Pluckers. Master Crane (NG halfling male **scout**), or "Gibbers" to those who know him, is a severe and hard-working halfling who leads the Pluckers—a union of halfling laborers responsible for harvesting the grapes from the wineries of the River Court. Gibbers wears patched overalls and a wide-brimmed hat decorated with a single crane feather. His hands are permanently stained dark purple from a lifetime of plucking the magical grapes.

Halliath Moro, Marshal of the Knights of the Deluge. Marshal Moro (LE elf male **knight**) is the leader of the River Court's small unit of elite king's guards, the Knights of the Deluge. He is rarely more than twenty feet from the king and, thanks to Ulorian's magic, has not slept is over seventy years. Moro is a devastating opponent whose armor is made entirely from hardened hydra scales. His helm is made from the skull of a particularly large hydra that he slew single-handedly when it threatened the spires. He wields a sentient glaive named *Torrent* with the power to control water and summon elemental guardians.

DINNER WITH KING ULORIAN

Though the feasting hall of the River Court is a cold and watery place where the walls themselves are made from the Neurabon and the guests are half-submerged, it is still a wondrous and oddly inviting place. Those glowing blooms which appear so often to light the dark places of the court lend a soft and admittedly maudlin ambience. The strange little spirits carrying plates of fish and cold soups are as filled with charm as they are razor-sharp teeth.

Being Seated. Guests are brought into the feasting hall under the river's muddy banks through a dripping tunnel whose entrance is guarded by several water elementals. Before being seated at the king's long, stone table, guests who require it are targeted by spells to keep them dry despite being partially submerged in the cold water of the Neurabon.

Welcome. After taking their seat at the table, the guests are welcomed by the River Court's most famous orator, Prince Suss, who retells the founding of the court before enumerating the many victories of King Ulorian.

First Wine. Each guest is served wine from the River Court's reserves. This magical drink allows all creatures to speak and understand the Aquan tongue.

The King is Seated. King Ulorian is announced and arrives to sit at the head of the table. The king prefers simple robes that drape and flow. The water that he passes through rises and forms small decorative shapes—the king's wake is a reminder of his immense power and connection with the river in which he has built his castle.

Second Wine and Tales. The guests are served a second glass of enchanted wine that allows them to breathe underwater for the duration of the dinner. At the king's request, Prince Suss recounts the stories of the court.

Dinner. Dinner, consisting mostly of steamed fish and root vegetables, is served first to the king and then to each guest. The servants at the meal are small water sprites who cart the plates to and from the table with a gentle rippling sound.

Cases and Accolades. After dinner, and provided King Ulorian is in the mood, guests may both plead their case for the king to intervene in some matter and praise the king for his actions and hospitality. The king rarely speaks during this part of dinner, reserving his judgement for later. Sometimes, if an accolade is exceptionally well articulated, the king may offer his favor in the form of a valuable curio or a promise to act.

The King Departs. When he decides dinner is over, the king rises and leaves. Occasionally, the king stops to acknowledge a guest whose company he has particularly enjoyed. Most of the time, the king simply exits, flanked by several guards.

The Guests Depart. The guests are ushered from the feasting hall. With the effects of the wine activated, they often end the evening with a swim in the shallows of the river. Each guest is given a smooth river stone with the sigil of the king engraved on one side. The stone is magical and can be squeezed to produce a half-gallon of drinkable water each day.

Knights of the Deluge

Led by Marshal Moro, the Knights of the Deluge are a small unit of elite guards dedicated to protecting King Ulorian. They wear enchanted chainmail whose interlocking chains appear to flow like waves across their chests. The glaive is the official weapon of the knights who defend the court from the wild things of the Arbonesse and enact the will of their king in Midgard. Some of these knights have trained in elemental magic and can wield it to assure their victory in combat. These rare warriors call themselves Extinguishers.

KNIGHT OF THE DELUGE

Medium humanoid (elf), lawful neutral

Armor Class 16 (chainmail)
Hit Points 71 (13d8+13)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	12 (+1)	12 (+1)	11 (+0)	10 (+0)	15 (+2)

Saving Throws Con +3
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10
Languages Aquan, Elvish
Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Blessing of the Neurabon. The knight gains a swim speed equal to its speed and can breathe air or water whenever it is in the River Neurabon.

Actions

Multiattack. The knight makes two glaive attacks.

Glaive. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +5 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d10 + 3) slashing damage.

Surge (Recharges after a Short or Long Rest). The knight is carried forward by a magical wave of water. It moves its speed in a straight line toward one target and makes a glaive attack, doing an additional 3 (1d6) force damage for every five feet it moves using this ability. Creatures struck by this attack are knocked prone.

EXTINGUISHER

Medium humanoid (elf), lawful neutral

Armor Class 16 (chainmail)

Hit Points 130 (20d8+40)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)	15 (+2)

Saving Throws Con +4

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

Languages Aquan, Elvish

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Blessing of the Neurabon. The Extinguisher gains a swim speed equal to its speed and can breathe air or water whenever it is in the River Neurabon.

Innate Spellcasting. The Extinguisher's spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 15). The extinguisher can innately cast the following spells, requiring only verbal components.

At will: *chill touch, light, ray of frost*

2/day each: *fog cloud, thunderwave*

1/day: *misty step*

Actions

Multiattack. The extinguisher makes three glaive attacks.

Glaive. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +6 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d10 + 3) slashing damage.

Surge (Recharges after a Short or Long Rest). The Extinguisher is carried forward by a magical wave of water. It moves its speed in a straight line toward one target and makes a glaive attack, doing an additional 4 (1d8) force damage for every five feet it moves using this ability. Creatures struck by this attack are knocked prone.

Magical Wines of the River Court

Kept in cool, dark underground chambers below the Neurabon river, the wine reserved for magical enchantment is aged at least twenty years before being removed. The brackish cellars, filled with racks of dark wine, are kept clean by a variety of snail loyal to King Ulorian.

WINE OF THE COURT

Wondrous item (wine), common

The white glass of this bottle of sweet, dark red wine is made from the sand found along the banks of the Neurabon river. It contains enough for six servings and bears the sigil of Ulorian the First, King of the River Court. A creature who drinks a serving of this wine may speak and understand Aquan for 1 hour. Creatures who drink more than one serving within 24 hours must make a successful DC 12 Constitution saving throw or become incapacitated for 1d4 hours.

WINE OF THE RIVER

Wondrous item (wine), uncommon

Kept in ebon-colored bottles, this sweet, aged wine tastes of citrus and a delicate flower that grows only on at the edge of the Neurabon river. The bottle contains four servings and is embossed with the oar-shaped symbol of Charun. A creature who drinks a serving of this wine may breathe both air and water for 1 hour. Additionally, the imbiber is filled with knowledge about the Arbonesse forest and gains advantage on Intelligence (history) checks about the forest for 1 hour. Creatures who drink more than one serving within 24 hours must make a successful DC 14 Constitution saving throw or become incapacitated for 1d4 hours.

ADVENTURE AND DUNGEONEERING

GUARDIANS OF THE TRIFLES

by Troy E. Taylor

In this 10th-level adventure, the player characters embark on an exploration of the Arbonesse, the last bastion of the elves. They find themselves enmeshed in the intrigues of the River Court, sending them off to the realm of the Wild Hunt on a quest for a magic item desired by no less a personage than his Implacable Majesty, Ulorian the First.

This adventure features many creatures from *Tome of Beasts* (TOB).

PC Hooks

There are many ways to hook an adventurer, but here's a couple possible reasons to visit the Arbonesse:

- The Old Cities of the Arbonesse were abandoned and overtaken by wilderness, but it's a good bet magic items and treasures were left behind.
- The PCs' desire to visit the River Court where exiled elves and their allies reside.

Part 1: Trespassing into the Arbonesse

The PCs have traveled through the forest for several days when they come upon this scene, which can be read aloud to the players:

"There is a break in the forest, a stretch of chest-high grasses, dotted with bluebells and white breeches. All is still and tranquil. At the far end of the break, you see the White Hart! The great antlered deer of Arbonesse legend stands regally in the light of day. The creature is majestic and takes your breath away.

"There is a rustling and a flock of birds erupts from the tree line. The White Hart's head swivels toward the sound. Breaking through is a hunting party of shadow elves."

The hunting party includes an **enchantress** (TOB) who is in the process of casting *hold monster* at the White Hart. A **forest hunter** (TOB) leads the hunting party and has his longbow nocked but is waiting on the release of the spell. The other four archers are also shadow elf **scouts**.

Read aloud:

"The enchantress's spell is cast but has no effect. The White Hart bounds away, heading straight at the adventurers. The shadow elves unleash their first volley, but none find their mark."

The PCs may take any actions they desire. The White Hart will race past them with a supernatural speed and agility. This brings the PCs into a direct confrontation with the shadow elf hunters who attack them without provocation.

Should combat ensue, it is interrupted before its conclusion by the piercing sound of a hunting horn. On all sides, a large patrol numbering twenty or more guardian elves appear. All wear a patch depicting the sun and river crest of the River Court. Captain Elynwyd, an **elvish veteran archer** (TOB), leads them. Against such odds, the shadow elves put down their arms and surrender.

The enchantress introduces herself to Elynwyd. "I am Cavatina, and we are emissaries of the Black Prince. We beg mercy of the Lord of Exiles, for we were unable to stop these outsiders!"

Elynwyd then addresses the PCs. "You have done a great service in fighting these poachers. Please accompany us back to the River Court, so we can present you to Lord Ulorian."

If the PCs balk at the request, the captain will insist.

If the PCs go their own way, the GM may consider these options:

- Bring in an even larger patrol and force the PCs to comply.
- Skip the next encounter and have the PCs discover the glade in Part 3.
- Possibly, the PCs will join forces with the shadow elves. In this case, the shadow elves serve as "guides" to the glade.

Part 2: Court of the River King

The PCs arrive at River Court. Read the following to the players:

"The company arrives at the city of white stone citadels erected along the Neurabon River. The city is a bustling, vibrant trading hub. The city has a cheerful buzz about it with merchants hawking goods to exuberant shoppers while lively, chime-filled music fills the air. A swan boat of no discernable propulsion ferries the company to the island palace, which features towers of water, pearl, and ice. The company pauses in the courtyard to mingle with courtiers. Then it is permitted to enter the lesser court, a hall with an elegant driftwood decor. Ulorian, in a cloak of shimmering, flowing water, is in the midst of receiving petitions from his vassals. The courtiers are colorfully garbed. In addition to elf and elfmarked attendants, there are many wondrous fey creatures. After a herald's introduction, Elynwyd presents the company."

If the GM has the adventure *Wrath of the River King*, it contains a map of Ulorian's palace. The map is not necessary, however.

Those at court have their own objectives:

- Cavatina was caught red-handed attempting to poach the White Hart in an effort to please the Black Prince. To avoid the headman's axe, Cavatina grovels and begs Ulorian's forgiveness. She makes any pledge he requires.
- Ulorian is the **River King** (TOB). He has little interest in this episode except he has no wish to antagonize the Black Prince until he has decided whether to ally the River Court with his ascendant power. He is inclined to mercy to salvage relations. His other concern is more pressing: Gaining the upper hand on the Lord of the Hunt. Ulorian wants to exert some leverage over him—tweak his pride or test his power.
- Elynwyd is aware of Ulorian's dilemma and would use the PCs (and possibly the enchantress Cavatina, if the GM is inclined to boost the party) to infiltrate the Lord of the Hunt's realm so that Ulorian retains deniability if anything goes wrong.

While in Elynwyd's custody—in the courtyard and again in Ulorian's presence—PCs should have the opportunity to discern the mood and overriding concerns of those assembled. As needed, the GM can call for DC 10 ability checks of Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma for the PCs to gain this information. Above all, successful checks should reveal Ulorian's concerns with both the Lord of the Hunt and the Black Prince.

The GM should encourage interaction between the PCs and Ulorian. If the PCs hope to persuade Ulorian or any of his courtiers on a point, make opposed ability checks.

Ulorian makes two declarations as the audience ends:

- **To Cavatina**. “We should deal with you much more harshly. But we wish to foster good relations between our kingdom and the domain of the shadow fey, and your trespasses did no actual harm. Return to the Black Prince with the understanding that we of the River Court do not take kindly to unannounced ‘hunting expeditions,’ even when the hunters are of close kinship. Arranged in advance, you will find us receptive hosts, though we limit our sport to game that is in abundance. Understand our resolve. Until we escort you from our borders, you will be our guests but under the watchful eyes of our beloved captain Elynwyd. We invite you to stay and witness as we exercise our good judgement in this other matter.”
- **To the PCs**. “We are gravely concerned by your intrusion from outside our sheltering forest. Are no borders sacred in your sight? Do you follow your own whims rather than good sense? Are you like those for whom nature is simply a resource to be exploited? But perhaps the inclinations of trespassers such as yourselves can be employed to a more fruitful outcome. Elynwyd would employ you, but we are not so sure it is within our writ to command subjects of another prince. Suffice to say, we would take it kindly if you would perform a small task. I would dine on sunflower seeds from the sacred glade. They are a delicacy we find to our liking. Elynwyd will show the way. Accomplish this task and earn our loyalty.”

Part 3: Sacred Glade

The PCs come upon the sacred glade. The PCs’ objective is to gain a chain of orichalcum then dive into the whirlpool and be transported to the lands of the Wild Hunt.

As they arrive, read this description:

“The glade is the very picture of sylvan serenity. The air is filled with sweet fragrance of wildflowers. A bubbling brook tumbles over a stairstep waterfall and flows into the pond. The surrounding trees cover half the glade in shade. Three elves in diaphanous woodland attire, accompanied by a small fey creature with butterfly-like wings, are stringing together dandelions and using magic to transform them into a golden chain. They are giggling as they work. A trio of fluttering pixies are plucking seeds from a wild stand of sunflowers near the shore. The pixies zip about, playing tag before depositing the seeds in a sachet. At the center of the pool, four water nymphs are swimming with synchronized precision, a clockwise whirlpool developing in their wake. Four winged sprites with bows and wearing dour expressions flit about the glade’s perimeter, keeping watch. All the fey creatures have expressions of expectation.”

The creature helping fashion the orichalcum chain is a **dau** (TOB) named Seriathe. The aquatic nymphs are fey akin to **merfolk**.

The “guide” for this encounter—either Elynwyd, Cavatina, or Seriathe—explains the situation if Ulorian’s intimations at court are not understood. There is more to this than collecting sunflower seeds.

“We do not know what trials await you,” the guide says, indicating the vortex in the pool, “except you will transported to the realm of the Lord of the Hunt. Seek out the doila, which is elvish for ‘fate speaker.’ The doila knows your true destiny. You will recognize it as a catfolk creature wearing stoles embroidered with arcane symbols. But the doila must be coerced or compelled. Bind the dolia in these orichalcum chains, and it will do your bidding.

Even so, beware. When it prophesies, two utterances will be true and one will be false."

Seriathe then speaks. "You may ask of me one boon. If it is in my power, I will grant it." The dau has some spellcasting and an extensive knowledge of the intrigues of the River Court but is a stickler for etiquette. The dau will respond only if the PCs are polite. A DC 10 Charisma (Persuasion) check is required.

The guide then says: "Pixies, cast some seeds upon the waters, and if they are carried to the 'other side,' our guests can be on their way!"

The PCs need to swim out to and dive into the vortex. It is a DC 15 Strength (Athletics) check to swim against the magical current and enter the vortex. It transports them to the realm of the Wild Hunt.

Part 4: Fatespinning Doila

The PCs emerge on the "other side" in the center of a pond. The glade is nearly identical to the one they left, except it is night. There is an ominous, oppressive feeling. A swarm of fireflies moves across the pond and into the surrounding trees but momentarily illuminates a footpath through the green. A hare darts out and hops down the footpath.

The dark forest path leads several hundred yards to the lair of the doila. It is an ancient ruin of stonework. There is an obelisk carved with arcane symbols. The doila looks like a medium-sized catfolk of black fur wearing stoles embroidered with arcane symbols.

The doila is an ancient entity known as a **nichny** (TOB). It is up to the GM to decide if the doila will willingly answer three questions about their past, present, or future or if it must first be captured with the orichalcum chain. Either way, the creature and the chains disappear once its third answer is given.

There are five "Guardians of Trifles" in the immediate area. These are fey creatures tasked with protecting a magical item. The GM selects or randomly determines which of two genuine trials the doila will reference. There is also one false trial that has a monster intended to be the PCs' doom.

Here are the five. The quoted response is how the doila describes it. The changing tense depends on whether the prophecy answers a question about the past, present, or future—keeping in mind that the PCs' perception of time is distorted in fey realms.

- A covey of hags guards a *mirror of life trapping*: "The drapery is removed. I see six, a reflection, three pair? Avert your eyes, lest the visage be too painful to behold. Your prison was/is/will be made of glass and silver. Your doom was/is/will be ugliness and despair."
- Malphas duelists guard an *oathbow*: "Woe be unto you. Did you/are you/will you heed(ing) the storm crow's warning? What do the duelists care for the twig and the twine? They carry flashing blades."
- A weeping treant wears a *ring of shooting stars* upon a fingerlike branch guarded by a selang companion: "Two they are, made alike and unlike by the same twisted devotion. One revels in the distortion but cannot abide to hold the void; the other weeps, a ringbearer without hands. Compassion was/is/will be misplaced here."
- A brood of kikimora guard a spell scroll of *prismatic spray* in an abandoned wizard's hut: "Hateful bird. Hateful woman. Hateful bird-woman, clutching a rainbow. From hidey-hole diminutive, it fouled/fouls/will foul the whole."
- A duskthorn dryad and its vine troll skeleton guard a *staff of the woodlands* in its grove: "A grove of wood, dark and twisted, save one. There is allure in bark, leaf and branch, much to fear from a heart of thorns. They commanded/commands/will command bones to walk."

The false trial is a swarm of wolf spirits that chase the unworthy into the cave lair of a savager.

- Supposedly they guard their lord's *scimitar of speed*, but in truth, it is an empty scabbard: "*A blade of speed and precision, was/is/will be intended for the master of the Wild Hunt. Trusted canines show the way. Do not disturb the bear's peaceful slumber.*"

Part 5: Guardians of the Trifles

Each of the trials is detailed here. In the land of the Wild Hunt, game trails are the norm, foot and cart paths rarer. The circumstances of how the PCs crossed over and the magical nature of their quests allows "shortcuts" through the realm, short journeys to the trial sites. Not all the guardians will fight to the death; they will yield or flee if it appears their lives are in jeopardy.

The Way Back. The players still hold onto a magical connection to the sacred glade. Diving into the pond on this side will transport the PCs back to where the aquatic fey are maintaining the vortex.

OLD HUNTING LODGE

A coven of hags resides in this two-story, former hunting lodge. The first is a *mirror hag* (TOB), Sister Amie, who sits in a rocking chair clutching a lap blanket and greeting visitors in the main room. Sister Amie invites visitors to gaze into her mirror. Covered by a drapery, the *mirror of life trapping* hangs over the fireplace. The other two are **green hags**. Sister Belle comes from the upstairs wearing a sleeping gown and possessing a bad attitude. Sister Christine comes in from a side door from the kitchen carrying a ladle, insisting visitors taste her foul-smelling concoction.

PINE TREE ENCAMPMENT

A **malphas** (TOB) mercenary captain erected a campaign tent and his company of three **ravenfolk warriors** (TOB) are gathered around a campfire beneath a stand of sheltering pine trees. They are wary warriors. Their charge is to keep safe their master's *oathbow*, which is on a stand in the tent.

WILDFIRE RUIN

A clump of twisted, charred trees is the remnant of a wildfire. Sitting in the crook of one of the trees is a **selang** (TOB), singing an off-key rendition of a song of battle, pain, and bloodshed, ready to switch to its Alien Piping ability. The selang's tree is a **weeping treant** (TOB), and it wears a *ring of shooting stars*.

ABANDONED WIZARD'S HUT

From tiny hidey-holes, three **kikimora** (TOB) infest this former wizard's hut. The kikimora are accidental guardians. When the hut's former occupant hastily fled, she left behind a case with a scroll of *prismatic spray* in a desk.

DUSKTHORN GROVE

The grove of thorny trees is tightly packed, any movement in this area requires a DC 10 Dexterity save to avoid taking 1d10 piercing damage. The *staff of the woodlands* is camouflaged to look like one of the trees. A **duskthorn dryad** (TOB), Lanie, can command a **vine troll skeleton** (TOB) to defend the staff.

FALSE TRIAL

The game trail turns into a series of sharp turns and grows narrower from surrounding dark woods. A *swarm of wolf spirits* (TOB) begins a howling pursuit of the PCs, herding them down the path toward the lair of the **savager** (TOB). A single empty scabbard is all they find.

Part 6: A Theft Discovered

The PCs return to court. Ulorian receives the PCs. "We sent you for sunflower seeds. Hardly a taxing endeavor. We dined without you. What took you so long?"

If the PCs present their trifle, Ulorian accepts it gladly. "Well, this most definitely is not sunflower seeds but a suitable substitute."

Once the prize is delivered, the **Lord of the Hunt** (TOB) storms in. If the GM believes the fey lord is too powerful, substitute his **dullahan** (TOB) servant.

The Lord of the Hunt's voice resonates. "There are thieves in this fish-loving, soggy court! My honor demands justice!"

Ulorian looks to the PCs. "You didn't steal this trifle from the realm of the Wild Hunt, did you? Tsk, tsk. What does my lord's honor require?"

"Trial by combat!" the Lord of the Hunt cries.

"So be it," says Ulorian.

Unless the PCs can find a noncombative resolution, the Lord of the Hunt will engage them. The River King will not let the combat turn lethal. Once someone appears in true jeopardy (such as two failed death saves), the River King will intercede, using his personal authority to command the fighting to cease. His Grasping Whirlpool ability can restrain the aggressors. Clerics provide healing.

The combat satisfies Ulorian's desire to test his peer. The PCs gain a powerful ally in Ulorian, the third-ranking fey lord. The PCs are now free to explore the Arbonesse with Ulorian's blessing.

CITY OF BLUE BLOCKS

by Richard Green

"As the dust goblin rowed us across the waters, the City of Blue Blocks hove into view through the mists. Ten colossal pillars of unearthly blue stone towered above the small rocky island in the center of the lake. In their shadow stood a ramshackle trading town and docks. Amazingly, yet more buildings had been constructed 200 feet up atop the pillars, reachable from the ground by stone stairs and by bridges from the other columns. Stepping onto the island, I wondered who or what had built these strange pillars and for what purpose?"

—*Marvels and Curiosities of the Wasted West: An Almanack*, by Tavareen Windrider

Centuries ago, war raged across the former magocracies of what became the Wasted West as the mages vied for control of the ley lines, wielding dangerous and unpredictable magic. Acid rains and vampiric fog were called down on rival towns and cities and, worse still, terrifying alien monstrosities—the Great Walkers—were summoned from the Realms Beyond to wipe out their enemies.

As the Mage Wars grew to a terrible climax, Diagur the Untiring, archmage of Vael Turog and erstwhile pupil of the future Master of Demon Mountain, sought the means to eliminate his rival Tulomeck of Allain. He turned to the *Halaaz Tablets*, thirteen plaques of strange blue crystal inscribed with mysterious glyphs. Diagur believed he had correctly deciphered a ritual on the sixth tablet that would banish Tulomeck, his tower, and the surrounding area to the cold reaches of the Yawning Void with no hope of return to Midgard.

But the arrogant archmage had overestimated his own capabilities and botched the spell. Not only was he off-target by nearly 50 miles, erroneously centering the effects on Lake Leukos, but when he opened the portal to the Realms Beyond, the ritual caused a group of alien structures to manifest in Midgard. These are the ten blue stone pillars that stand in the City of Blue Blocks to this day. As for the hapless Diagur, a voidling summoned by his nemesis Tulomeck made short work of him before turning on its master, and the *Halaaz Tablets* were scattered.

Visiting the City of Blue Blocks

The strange square pillars of the City of Blue Blocks are 400 feet wide and 200 feet high and are made from a translucent blue stone not seen anywhere else in Midgard. The columns are without seams or joins and have proved impervious to damage.

Ever since the pillars appeared on the island in the middle of Lake Leukos, they have been a source of great interest to the wizards of Bemmea. Expeditions were dispatched from the Academies Arcana to study the stone blocks, and a small community and trading hub has grown up around the pillars, which continue to fascinate arcanists to this day.

Recently, rumors that several of the infamous *Halaaz Tablets* are perhaps hidden here have drawn adventurers and would-be treasure hunters to the city.

The most notable features of the city are described below:

1. The Block Scramblers: Visitors to the City of Blue Blocks usually make landfall at the docks on the southwest tip of the island, where **dust goblins** from the Block Scramblers tribe will attempt to rent them a room or sell them whatever interesting knick-knacks they've manage to scavenge from the half-ruined empty buildings that make up most of the town crowded around the base of the pillars. The best place to stay is the Muddy Boot, an overpriced but comfortable goblin-run inn. The Boot serves a tasty eel pie, cooked by the clumsy but jolly Marri Threefingers. Marri's son recently ran off to join the Black Goat's Flock (area 3).

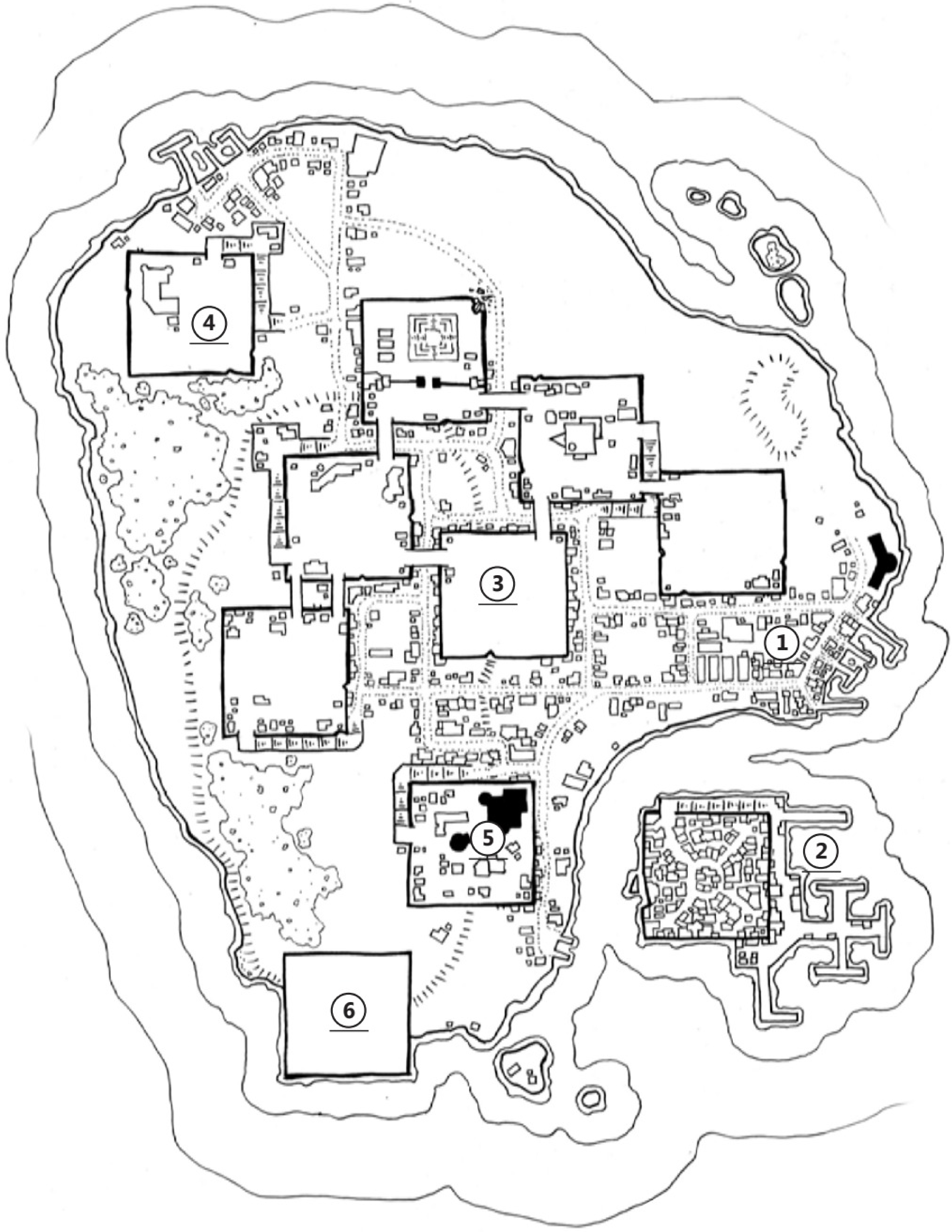
2. Blue Haven: Apprentice mages from Bemmea's Academies Arcana visiting the city to study the blue pillars stay in the community of Blue Haven—several dozen well-constructed one and two-story buildings situated on top of this pillar, reached by a set of stairs leading up from its own docks. A number of secret societies and fraternities are represented here, including the Obscured and the Sons of Vael Turog, a group dedicated to uncovering lost (and dangerous) magics of the fallen magocracies.

Leruva Ramek, a **Bemmean void wizard**, heads up the Sons of Vael Turog expedition. A descendent of Dar Ramek, the infamous mage who rained acid down on Cuculla in the Great Mage Wars, he shares his ancestor's penchant for mayhem.

Leruva believes (rightly) that there is a connection between the dread *Halaaz Tablets* and the blue pillars. He has four of the tablets and has been studying them in an attempt to interpret the inscriptions on the Pillar of Glyphs. So far, he has been stymied in his researches, but past expeditions have determined that the pillars run down into the earth for at least 50 feet and Leruva is convinced that manipulating the glyphs correctly will provide access to the interior. If he had all of the *Halaaz Tablets*, things would be easier. Leruva has heard stories that one of the missing tablets is in the possession of the Black Goat's Flock and that the shadow fey may have hidden one or more on top of the Pillar of Shadow. Perhaps he can convince the PCs to retrieve them?

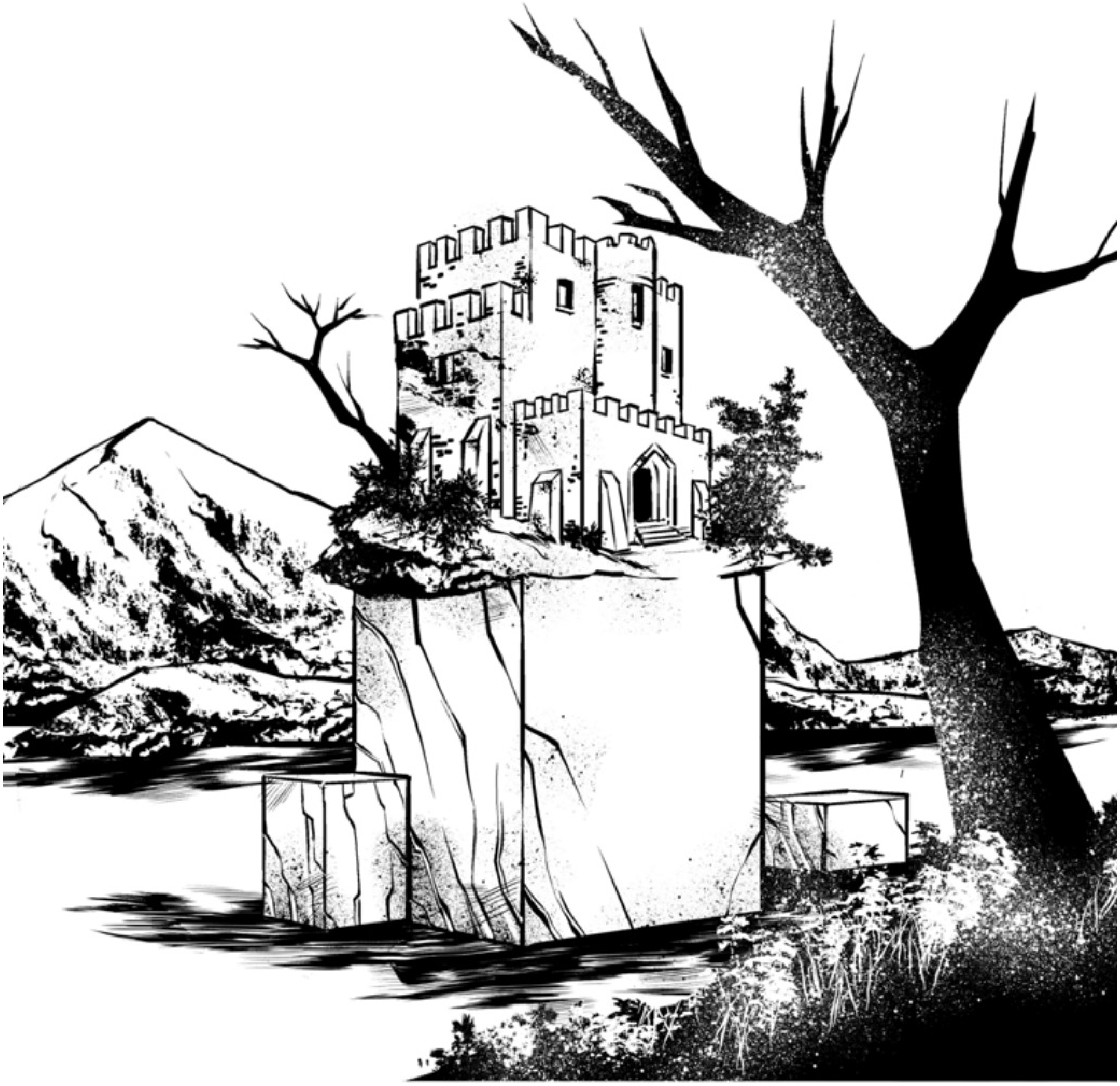
Leruva is tall and thin with long, lank black hair and a pale complexion from spending most of his youth inside the Librarium Caelmarath. He wears black robes embroidered with the ancient sigil of Vael Turog and carries an ebony staff topped with a cube of alien blue stone. He talks in a soft, measured voice, which makes it all the more terrifying when he switches to Void Speech.

3. The Central Pillars: The six central pillars are sparsely inhabited now but when visiting expeditions to the city were at their height, stairs were built to the top of these pyramids and bridges constructed between them. Today, an oddball collection of dust goblins, explorers, and others still live on top of these pillars. Most notably, cultists of the Black Goat's Flock have moved into the step pyramid on the easternmost column. Led by a dust goblin **cult fanatic** named Azzran who was initiated into the cult by First Speaker Tivishta Trikinta herself, the cultists have so far succeeded in luring a dozen Block Scramblers to swell their ranks. The cult's treasure hoard includes one of the *Halaaz Tablets*.



4. Pillar of Shadow: This pillar was once home to a shadow fey enchantress and her entourage from the Court of Scandal in the Arbonesse. The shadow fey were driven out of the City of Blue Blocks by the arrival of the Feywardens but left an **eye golem** (see *Tome of Beasts*) behind as a guard in case they ever need to return. A secret compartment in the wall of the building located on top of this pillar conceals two of the *Halaaz Tablets*.

5. Feywardens' Fortress: Marriot Splitleaf, Feywarden of Tintager, ordered a small fortress to be constructed on top of this pillar as a base for his warmages in case the elves of the Arbonesse decide to mount a raid across



the lake. Since driving away the shadow fey, things have remained quiet for the garrison and the Feywardens stationed here spend most of their time hunting the eel hounds living in the lake. Recent rumours of the appearance of a new Walker in the forest has put Feywarden Skythra (CN female tiefling **knight**) and her men on a state of high alert.

6. Pillar of Glyphs: This pillar stands apart from the others on the northwest corner of the island. The eastern side of the column is carved with strange glyphs—raised and inverted dots, interspersed with non-Euclidian symbols. The presence of these unsettling markings have deterred anyone from building on top of the pillar. These symbols can be decoded by studying the seven surviving *Halaaz Tablets*.

Halaaz Tablets: Written in Void Speech by a sorcerer from the Realms Beyond eons ago, there were originally thirteen of these blue crystal tablets. Six are lost, including the tablet containing the ritual which brought the City of Blue Blocks to Midgard, but seven can be found in the city, and these are sufficient to interpret the glyphs.

Reading Void Speech is dangerous. A PC studying the tablets must make a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw or suffer the effects of short-term madness for 1d10 minutes. If the saving throw is failed by 5 or more, long-term madness ensues for 1d10 × 10 hours.

Once a PC has studied the tablets, they can attempt a DC 25 Intelligence (Arcana) check with advantage to determine which symbols must be traced in what sequence to activate the pillar. Thirteen symbols in all must be traced with a finger with each one inflicting 3 (1d6) necrotic damage on the person tracing them as their fingers start to blacken and shrivel. If Leruva attempts to activate the pillar, he will use captured dust goblins to trace the symbols for him.

Once the symbols have been traced, there is a great rumbling as the pillar slowly slides upward for 60 feet, exposing a hidden door. The doorway slides open, revealing a set of smooth blue stone steps leading down to an underground complex of the same blue stone situated beneath the pillars of the city and inhabited by **gibbering mouthers** and other aberrant monsters.

Eventually, the PCs can find their way to a central vault guarded by a powerful **voidling** (see *Tome of Beasts*) with 150 hit points. Once the aberration is destroyed, they can recover the treasure it is guarding: several thousand coins of alien design forged from other-worldly star metal (worth 2,000 gp), a *rift orb* and a *voidskin cloak* (see *Shades of Magic: Gifts from the Void* by Dan Dillon on the Kobold Press blog).

LERUVA RAMEK, BEMMEAN VOID WIZARD

Medium humanoid (human), neutral evil

Armor Class 12 (15 with mage armor)

Hit Points 71 (12d8 + 12)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
9 (–1)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	19 (+4)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)

Saving Throws Int +8, Wis +5

Skills Arcana +8, Deception +6, History +8, Religion +8

Senses passive Perception 11

Languages Common, Goblin, Void Speech

Challenge 9 (5,000 XP)

Spellcasting. The void wizard is a 12th-level spellcaster. Its spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 16, +8 to hit with spell attacks). The void wizard has the following wizard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *chill touch, crushing curse*, dancing lights, mage hand, word of misfortune**

1st level (4 slots): *mage armor, magic missile, protection from the void**

2nd level (3 slots): *destructive resonance*, maddening whispers*, misty step*

3rd level (3 slots): *counterspell, hypnotic pattern, void strike**

4th level (3 slots): *black tentacles, blight, confusion, stoneskin*

5th level (2 slots): *cone of cold, living shadows**

6th level (1 slot): *life drain**

* Void spell (see *Deep Magic: Void Magic*)

Void Focus. Leruva has advantage on Constitution saving throws made to maintain concentration on void spells.

ACTIONS

Dagger. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack*: +6 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 2 (1d4) piercing damage.

REACTIONS

Rebuke from Beyond (4/day). When damaged by an attack from a creature within 60 ft., the void wizard barks a destructive word of Void Speech. If the creature can hear the wizard, it takes 10 points of necrotic damage.

LEGACY OF THE UNHINGED GARDENERS

by Richard Green

> *"Nine days into the trip upriver, I could tell we were getting close to our destination. The vegetation along both banks grew more and more dense and . . . odd. The trees soared high into the sky, their branches overgrown with great tangles of vines, orchids, and bromeliads. Beneath the towering giants grew strange plants with unwholesomely large flowers in a variety of sickly colors that gave off an overpowering, almost intoxicating, perfume. On the tenth day, I caught a glimpse of something glinting in the sunlight through the trees. Slashing our way through the dense foliage, we could see ancient, marble paving stones here and there amidst the undergrowth and came across enormous basalt troughs, overflowing with plant life. Ahead was the source of the glinting—an enormous glasshouse filled with unfamiliar plants bearing pendulous, bloated fruits of virulent purple. We had arrived in the fabled Gardens of Carnessa . . ."*
>
> —Tavareen Windrider, *Marvels and Curiosities of the Wasted West: An Almanack*

Several hundred years ago, a group of mages from the now-vanished Empire of Caelmarath came south to the peninsula beyond the lands of the giants. Here, they built the splendid and magical Gardens of Carnessa: a wondrous place filled with fountains, pergolas, gazebos, summer houses, and all manner of exotic plant specimens that flourished in the region's warm and humid climate. The wizards conducted dozens of botanical experiments to enrich and add color to the gardens, which scholars believe were intended as a summer retreat for Caelmarath's wealthiest elite. Whether or not that is true, things took a dark turn when the archmage Melgrys the Etiolated, leader of the cabal, ordered his apprentices to cross-breed their creations with rare specimens harvested from the jungles of Kled and Chag-Hai, alien places located in the Realms Beyond. An obscure volume held in the libraries of the Academies Arcana suggests that Melgrys fell under the influence of "disturbing insect-like creatures from beyond time and space" and that these malevolent beings began to direct the archmage's botanical research.

Melgrys and the other wizards started creating a plant army to defeat Caelmarath's enemies, but this bold new strategy was to lead to their downfall. Many of their newly created plant specimens were intelligent, aggressive, mobile, and resistant to magic, and they proved unwilling to remain confined to the glasshouses. The deadly mutant plants broke free and turned on their creators, seizing control of the gardens before spreading throughout the jungles of the peninsula.

Exploring the Gardens

Despite the remote location, the sweltering jungle heat, and the dangerous inhabitants, bold explorers and curious arcane scholars still travel to the ruined gardens to uncover their lost secrets. It's hard to determine where the gardens stop and the jungle begins, but the ruined structures built by the mages are spread over three hundred acres. Some of the most important features are described below.

Basalt Planters: These thirty-foot-long planters are scattered throughout the gardens. Constructed from grey volcanic rock, they were used to grow new specimens and are overflowing with alien-looking plants. If the PCs come too close to a planter, roll a d4 and consult the table on the next page.

The plants can repeat their attacks on subsequent rounds (initiative 10) and can be attacked by the PCs—treat them as objects with AC 9, 30 hp, vulnerable to fire, and resistant to piercing damage. Disturbing the planters is likely to draw the attention of other inhabitants of the gardens. These include warlock's trumpetblooms, shambling mounds, awakened shrubs and trees, violet fungi, and other plant monsters.

Dread Gazebo: situated on top of a small hill, this white marble ornamental building is fifty feet in diameter with a domed roof. Octagonal in shape and open on four sides, it was designed to take advantage of the magnificent views across the gardens in their heyday. Now, it is home to a large warlock's trumpetbloom with maximum hit points. PCs searching the gazebo can find a leatherbound journal wrapped in oilcloth with a DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check. This belonged to one of the mages and contains copious notes on their botanical experiments as well as cryptic instructions on how to activate the portal in the Great Glasshouse.

Great Glasshouse: Constructed from magical glass as tough as steel and magically treated iron, this ornate greenhouse is the biggest structure in the gardens. Measuring two hundred feet by seventy-five feet, the glasshouse has a curved roof reaching fifty feet in height. The wizards grew their most unusual and dangerous specimens in this large building.

Today, the spells that reinforced the glass and prevented the metal framework from rusting have long since faded and the glasshouse has fallen into disrepair. Most of the glass is gone, and the rusty iron skeleton is overgrown with vines and creepers. Thick plant growth chokes much of the interior—PCs wishing to enter must spend four feet of movement for every one foot they move. In the center of the building where the plant growth is less dense, explorers can uncover the circle of tarnished silver runes inlaid into the stone floor where the mages opened a portal to the Realms Beyond.

Summer Palace: Once an impressive marble building where Melgrys and his wizards lived and worked, this structure is overgrown with unnatural vegetation. Vine-choked trees bearing pale, poisonous-looking fruits have grown inside the courtyard, causing great cracks in the palace walls. Their roots have splintered the paving slabs, and a colony of giant ants (see *Tome of Beasts*) has made its home in the earth beneath.

If the PCs can get past the insects, they may encounter Vos-Trobarr, a ravenala (see *Tome of Beasts*) who lives in the ruined great hall. This twenty-foot-tall anthropomorphic palm tree serves as the self-styled Chief Gardener. Vos-Trobarr seeks to minimize the spread of alien plant life in the jungles at the expense of indigenous, natural plants and trees. He is concerned by tales of the so-called "Emerald Walker" (see *Midgard Campaign Setting*) and will urge the PCs to uncover whatever they can about this newly-discovered alien threat.

d4	EFFECT
1	A hail of thorns is unleashed from the plants, raining down in a 15-foot-radius sphere centered on a point within 30 feet. Each creature caught in the area must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, taking 16 (3d10) piercing damage on a failed saving throw or half damage on a success.
2	The plants spray a cloud of deadly spores in a 30-foot cone, emanating from the planter. Each creature caught in the cloud must make a DC 16 Constitution saving throw. On a failed saving throw, targets take 10 (3d6) poison damage and become poisoned for one hour; on a success, they take half damage and are not poisoned.
3	Long, vine-like tendrils covered in vicious thorns lash out from the planter. The tendrils make one attack on each PC within 30 feet with a +7 bonus, inflicting 2d10 piercing damage on a successful hit.
4	As a roll of 3, but the tendrils are sticky and inflict no damage. Instead, if the attack hits, the target is grappled (escape DC 15). Until the grapple ends, the target is restrained and has disadvantage on Strength checks and Strength saving throws. Each round, grappled creatures are pulled 20 feet closer to the planter. A creature pulled into the planter takes 10 (3d6) acid damage and is engulfed (escape DC 15). Engulfed creatures take 21 (6d6) acid damage at the start of their turns, are restrained, and cannot breathe.

WARLOCK'S TRUMPETBLOOM

Large plant, neutral evil

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points 171 (18d10 +72)

Speed 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	10 (+0)	18 (+4)	6 (−2)	10 (+0)	6 (−2)

Saving Throws Str +7, Con +7

Skills Stealth +3, Perception +3

Damage Resistances fire

Damage Immunities poison

Condition Immunities blinded, deafened, exhaustion, poisoned

Senses blindsight 60 ft.; passive Perception 13

Languages None, but understand Void Speech

Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)

Alien Mind If a character casts *speak with plants* to communicate with a trumpetbloom, he or she must make a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw or become frightened of the trumpetbloom for one minute.

Magic Resistance The trumpetbloom has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Actions

Multiattack. The trumpetbloom makes a stinger attack and two tendril attacks.

Stinger. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +8 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 30 (4d12 + 4) piercing damage, and the target must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or become poisoned for one minute. The poisoned target is paralyzed, and it can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on a success.

Tendrils. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +6 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) bludgeoning damage and the target is grappled (escape DC 15).

This plant creature looks like something from a disquieting dream. Standing over ten feet tall, it has a long slender stem that grows out of the thick mass of tangled roots that it uses to shuffle forward. Its stem is topped with a huge trumpet-like orange flower while two twisting tendrils grow from its base, just above the root ball. A wicked-looking stinger, glistening with venom, flicks out of its "mouth" on the end of a whip-like tongue. The trumpetbloom clacks and croaks ominously as it advances.

Warlock's trumpetblooms were created in the Gardens of Carnessa by Melgrys and his cabal through a series of bizarre experiments that involved cross-breeding native jungle orchids and giant carnivorous plants with alien seed pods harvested in the jungles of Kled. Melgrys supervised the experiments personally, frequently consulting a living brain he kept in a glass cylinder. When the first trumpetblooms were propagated from seedlings, the mages were astounded at how quickly they grew and subsequently reproduced. An unstoppable army to fight for Carnessa in the Mage Wars was within their grasp, they believed. Their optimism proved misguided as the trumpetblooms broke free of the glasshouses and attacked their masters.

Warlock's trumpetblooms are aggressive and intelligent plant creatures that seek to spread their seed pods throughout the jungles of Carnessa (and beyond if they can find a way to break through or bypass the giants' Wall). Trumpetblooms are carnivores, feeding on the small deer, giant insects, and snakes that live in the jungle, but they will happily devour humanoid flesh when available, using their roots to soak up the nutrients from a decomposing corpse.

THE CRIMSON OUBLIETTE

by Brian Suskind

Down a forgotten passage of the Undercity, behind a partially cleared rockfall, lies the arched chamber containing the Crimson Oubliette. Once known as the Depths, this wretched prison of narrow-cell doors dotting the curving walls of a 500-foot-deep cylindrical shaft housed those who society wished to forget (including an entire tribe of scrags). Then a ground tremor collapsed the passages leading to the entrance and emptied an underground lake into the Depths. Those on the surface simply abandoned the guards, prisoners, and staff alike and, in time, the prison itself was forgotten.

Merging with the murky water flooding the prison, the prison's semi-sentient ooze waste disposal system fed off of the imprisoned and perpetually regenerating scrags and grew to fill the entire oubliette. Tribes of underground dwellers worship the ooze as a god and throw treasure into it as offerings. Others have also used the oubliette to dispose of dangerous items. For as the legend goes, the Jade Tome rests at the very bottom of the ooze-filled oubliette, thrown there by a dying paladin convinced it was too dangerous for mortal men. The Crimson Oubliette has claimed hundreds of would-be adventurers. Protected by potions of acid resistance or using fire to hold the ooze at bay, adventurers continue to descend into the ooze, combating the twisted denizens that make their home there, risking death to delve to the bottom of the Crimson Oubliette.

Summary

The PCs arrive at the entrance to the Crimson Oubliette and interrupt a group of kobolds dumping an offering of silver into the opening of the pit. After dealing with the draconic worshippers, the PCs descend into the oubliette either via potions or by carrying fire to keep the ooze at bay. With glittering treasure lurking below, the PCs make their way down and soon encounter the degenerated ancestors of the original guards and traps designed to thwart prison breaks. Unfortunately, the arrival of the PCs also attracts the Deepclaw Scrags who now act as extensions of the ooze's will. At the bottom of the Oubliette, the heroes must overcome a pair of constructs guarding the resting place of the Jade Tome.

Conditions in the Oubliette

Entering the ooze subjects a creature to the acidic nature of the ooze's innards. An immersed creature takes 7 (2d6) acid damage at the start of each turn. Any item or effect that offers acid resistance or immunity negates this effect. Metal, stone, and items of similar hardness are not dissolved by the acid.

Additionally, the ooze is vulnerable to and afraid of fire. A simple torch forces the ooze to withdraw or pull back to a 30-foot radius. This allows would-be explorers to descend into the oubliette. Once below 30 feet, the presence of a torch creates a 30-foot-radius bubble around the source of fire. Luckily, the ooze is permeable to air so breathing within the pocket is not an issue.

The reddish liquid of the ooze acts in most respects like normal water in terms of movement. It is very dark once the PCs descend beyond 30 feet.

Adventure Hooks

- The PCs are hired by Magister Varna, a noted archeologist, to recover the Jade Tome from the Oubliette.
- A foe of the PCs has stolen one of their prized possessions and thrown it into the ooze.
- To join an elite adventuring guild the PCs must descend into the ooze and bring back a prize.

1. INTERRUPTED OFFERING

The entrance to the Crimson Oubliette appears to be a 100-foot-wide shaft filled to the rim with a viscous red liquid.

The PCs arrive at the Crimson Oubliette just in time to see a small group of kobolds dumping two sacks of silver coin into the reddish liquid. The kobolds are distracted, giving the PCs advantage in terms of surprising them.

A DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check spots a lit torch lying on its side at the rim of the oubliette. The presence of the flame has caused the ooze to pull back from it. This gives the PCs a hint about needing fire to descend. This can also be determined by a DC 15 Intelligence check.

KOBOLDS (5)

Challenge 1/8 (25 XP each)
Hit Points 5 each (*Monster Manual*)

Treasure: A half-empty sack containing 2d20 silver pieces

2. THE CURVING STAIRS

A 10-foot-wide, rail-less stairway curves downward along the inside wall of the Oubliette with barred cell doors every 20 feet or so.

The ancient prison was well guarded against escape attempts and the stairs are trapped. Every 100 feet of stairs the following trap can be found:

Magic Missile Trap

Magic trap

When an intruder steps on a hidden pressure plate (20+ lb. of weight to activate), 1d4 magic missiles fire from a nearby hole in the wall, each targeting a random creature within 30 feet. The missiles function normally in water. Each creature struck takes 1d4+1 force damage. *Detect magic* reveals an aura of evocation around the opening (DC 13 *dispel magic* to destroy the trap). A DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check spots the pressure plate.

The GM can, of course, adjust the number of traps as desired.

3. PRISON CELLS

The doorway to each 15-foot-by-10-foot chamber is blocked by a cell door of steel bars.

Most of the cell doors are either locked (DC 15 Dexterity check) or simply stuck (DC 10 Strength check). To see what an individual cell holds, roll a d6 on the following table:

1. **Empty**
2. **Lurking Tribesman**: 1 scrag (see below)
3. **Guardians**: 1d3 former guards, now just animated armor (*Monster Manual*)

4. **Sad Remains**: skeleton chained to the wall
5. **False Storage Locker**: mimic (*Monster Manual*)
6. **Odd Pool**: 1d2 gray oozes (*Monster Manual*)

There is a 30% chance that a cell door is either open or unlocked. These creatures will attack on sight and fight to the death.

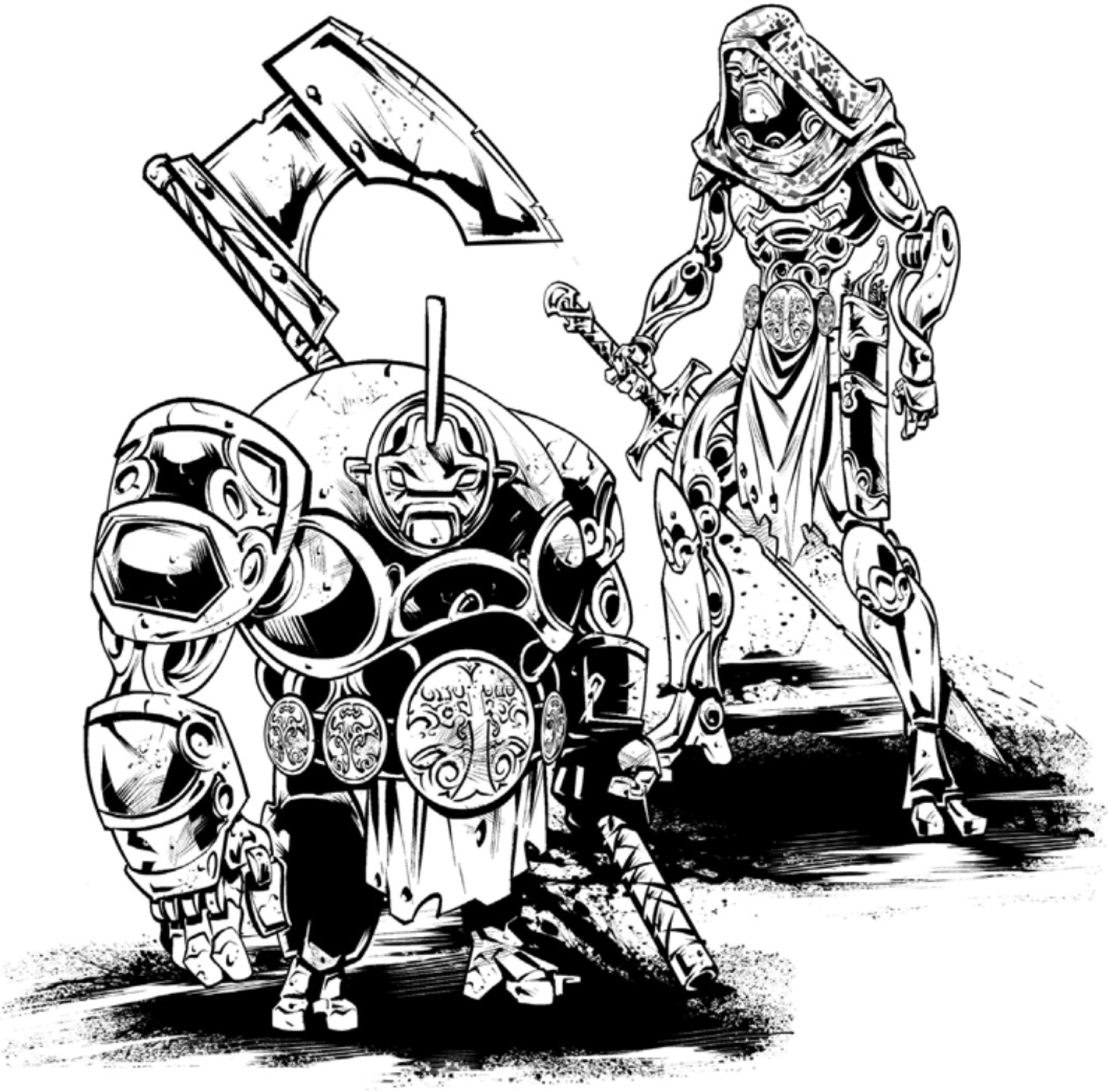
Treasure: At GM's discretion.

4. SCUFFLE WITH SCRAGS

This encounter can occur at the GM's discretion. It can happen once or repeatedly as needed. Though it is best placed after the PCs have investigated one or two cells.

Suddenly, a pair of emaciated humanoids with greenish, rubbery hides, wicked looking claws, and enlarged lower jaws burst out of the side of the air pocket.

(The description assumes the PCs are using fire to hold off the ooze. If they are exploring via a different method, adjust the text accordingly.)



LESSER SCRAG

Medium monstrosity, chaotic evil

Armor Class 13 (natural armor)

Hit Points 45 (6d10+12)

Speed 10 ft., swim 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18(+4)	10 (+0)	15 (+2)	8 (−1)	10 (+0)	9 (−1)

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages Abyssal, Aquan

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Amphibious: The scrag can breathe air and water

Regeneration: The lesser scrag regains 5 hit points at the start of its turn if it is in contact with water (or the Crimson Ooze). If the scrag takes acid or fire damage, this trait doesn't function at the start of the scrag's next turn. The scrag dies only if it starts its turn with 0 hit points and doesn't regenerate.

ACTIONS

Multiattack: The lesser scrag makes two attacks: one with its bite and one with its claws.

Bite: *Melee Weapon Attack*: +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8+4)

Claws: *Melee Weapon Attack*: +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (2d4+4)

The scrags make use of their swim speed to gain an advantageous attack on the PCs. They fight to the death.

Treasure: Each scrag has 1d20 gp.

5. GUARDIANS AT THE BOTTOM

Revealed by a glowing radiance from somewhere toward the middle of the area, the stairway ends on a 15-feet-wide, level platform that hugs the wall all the way around the circumference of the oubliette. The center of the chamber slopes downward toward a massive steel grating that must have once acted as drainage.

A pair of mechanical soldiers clad in acid pitted armor turn in your direction. Beneath their breastplate, gears tick and whir.

CLOCKWORK HUNTSMAN (2)

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Hit Points 110 (*Tome of Beasts*)

Left to guard the Jade Tome, these clockwork huntsmen will fight until destroyed.

Treasure: A DC 13 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals that the huntsmen's eyes are fire garnets (worth 50 gp each).

6. THE TREASURE OF THE OUBLIETTE

Just below the metal grate at the center of the room is a glittering pile of gold and silver. A strange glowing light emanates from a green book resting in the middle of the treasure hoard.

Opening the grating requires a DC 20 Strength check (though PCs can work together to make it easier)

Treasure: Years and years of offerings from tribesmen and the loot from fallen explorers, the hoard includes:

- 800 gp
- 10,210 sp
- 25,300 cp
- 15 assorted gems (worth a total of 500 gp)
- +1 vicious longsword
- Metal cap of disguise
- The Jade Tome

The Jade Tome is a thick book with pages made entirely of carved jade plates bound with mithril wire. The exact nature of the forbidden knowledge inscribed within the tome is beyond the scope of this adventure, but GMs are encouraged to use the Jade Tome as a launching point for further quests.

MONSTERS

PHOSUS, DREAD WYRM OF THE FALLS

by Jon Sawatsky

In the belly of the Dragoncoil Mountains lies an ancient and spectacular set of magma falls. The falls have many names but are most commonly known as the Firefalls of Ghoss. The story tells of a young dragonfolk sorcerer who, fleeing through the mountains from an angered nest of wyverns, discovered a wide tunnel leading to the falls. After descending into the mountain, he spied a ledge that looked out over the great flow of magma and, walking upon it, discovered a thinning of the veil between Midgard and the Eleven Hells. The sorcerer began to plot immediately.

Near the ledge in the heated stone walls around the magma flows, Ghoss built himself a fortress—hiring all manner of mercenaries, builders, and madmen to assist in its construction. The fortress housed Ghoss's greatest hope—a magical focus built to harness the raw elemental energy that emanated from the falls and the infernal magic cast by the gateway on the ledge. But unbeknownst to the sorcerer, a great malevolence slumbered in the deep places below where the firefalls flowed into darkness. On the eve of the celebration of the fortress's completion, a great wyrm imbued with magma and flame awoke to the sound of carousing and victory. Phosus, the dread wyrm of the falls arose and incinerated most of the celebrants in a single breath. "IT IS MINE," the beast roared and with that took up residence in Ghoss's fortress. The dragon found the focus and wrapped its fiery length around the stone and crystals, feeding on the stored magic.

As for the sorcerer, his life was spared, and he made a bargain with the wyrm. In exchange for five great magical treasures stolen from the temples of the gods, Ghoss could have access to the smoldering focus that Phosus now coveted. The dragon smiled and agreed, but upon the delivery of the final treasure, Phosus turned the sorcerer to ash.

The tunnel that leads to the Firefalls of Ghoss lies hidden somewhere in the Dragoncoil Mountains. Fiery creatures stalk its length, and the flames of Phosus itself await those who descend toward the fortress and that strange thinning between worlds that shimmers on the ledge.

PHOSUS, DREAD WYRM OF THE FALLS

Huge dragon, chaotic evil

Armor Class 19 (natural armor)

Hit Points 306 (17d12 + 102)

Speed 40 ft., climb 40 ft., fly 80 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	14 (+2)	23 (+6)	17 (+3)	14 (+2)	29 (+5)

Saving Throws Dex +7, Con +11, Wis +7, Cha +10

Skills Deception +10, Insight +7, Perception +12, Persuasion +10, Stealth +7

Damage Immunities fire

Damage Resistances cold; bludgeoning, piercing, slashing damage from nonmagical sources

Condition Immunities charmed, frightened

Senses blindsight 60 ft., darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 22

Languages Common, Draconic, Giant, Ignan, Infernal, Orc

Challenge 18 (20,000 XP)

Fire Incarnate. All fire damage dealt by the dragon ignores fire resistance but not fire immunity.

Keeper of the Gateway (Recharge Special, see Legendary Actions). When Phosus reduces a creature to 0 hit points, it may summon one devil or demon of CR 6 or less to assist it in combat. The summoned creature spawns atop the body of the fallen creature and obeys Phosus until it is destroyed or combat ends.

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If the dragon fails a saving throw, it can choose to succeed instead.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The dragon can use its Frightful Presence. It then makes one bite attack and two claw attacks.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +9 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 15 (2d10 + 4) piercing damage plus 7 (2d6) fire damage.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) slashing damage.

Tail. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +9 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d8 + 4) bludgeoning damage.

Frightful Presence. Each creature of the dragon's choice that is within 120 feet of the dragon and aware of it must succeed on a DC 18 Wisdom saving throw or become frightened for 1 minute. A frightened creature repeats the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success. If a creature's saving throw is successful or the effect ends for it, the creature is immune to the dragon's Frightful Presence for the next 24 hours.

Fire Breath (Recharge 5–6). The dragon exhales fire in a 60-foot cone. Each creature in that area takes 63 (18d6) fire damage, or half damage with a successful DC 19 Dexterity saving throw. Each creature in that area must also succeed on a DC 18 Wisdom saving throw or go on a rampage for 1 minute. A rampaging creature must attack the nearest living creature or smash some object smaller than itself if no creature can be reached with a single move. A rampaging creature repeats the saving throw at the end of each of its turns, ending the effect on itself on a success.

Shifting Flames. The dragon magically polymorphs into a creature that has immunity to fire damage and a size and challenge rating no higher than its own, or back into its true form. It reverts to its true form if it dies. Any equipment it is wearing or carrying is absorbed or borne by the new form (the dragon's choice). In a new form, the dragon retains its alignment, hit points, Hit Dice, ability to speak, proficiencies, Legendary Resistance, lair actions, and Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma scores, as well as this action. Its statistics and capabilities are otherwise replaced by those of the new form, except any class features or legendary actions of that form.

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

The dragon can take three legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The dragon regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Detect. The dragon makes a Wisdom (Perception) check.

Devour Infernal. Phosus devours any creature it summoned using its Keeper of the Gateway trait. It's Keeper of the Gateway trait recharges. The devoured creature must have at least 1 hit point remaining or this action fails.

Tail Attack. The dragon makes a tail attack.

Wing Attack (Costs 2 Actions). The dragon beats its wings. Each creature within 15 feet of the dragon must succeed on a DC 17 Dexterity saving throw or take 11 (2d6 + 4) bludgeoning damage and be knocked prone. The dragon can then fly up to half its flying speed.

LAIR ACTIONS

The lair of Phosus is fully described in the *Firefalls of Ghoss*.

On initiative count 20 (losing initiative ties), the dragon takes a lair action to cause one of the following effects, but the dragon can't use the same effect two rounds in a row.

Ignite the Focus. Phosus draws upon the magical focus at the heart of its lair, unleashing a billowing cloud of sulfuring smoke which fills the lair and chokes living creatures within it. Any creature within 200 feet of Phosus must make a DC 15 Constitution save or be blinded and unable to speak until the end of their next turn. The smoke heals Phosus for 20 (3d10 +3) hit points.

Magma Rain. Phosus causes the firefalls to spew magma, which rains down around him in a 30-ft. radius. Creatures caught in the rain must succeed a DC 15 Dexterity check, taking 21 (6d6) fire damage on a failed save or half as much on a successful one.

Rock the Rock. Phosus smashes his great tail upon the stones of his fortress, sending a shockwave in a 60-foot cone in any direction he chooses. Creatures caught in the shockwave must succeed a DC 15 Strength check or fall prone.

Ghoss's Offerings

Phosus prizes the following treasures above all others in its horde. Each was brought to the dragon by Ghoss, who acquired them through treachery, gall, and murder. The elders and high priests from whom the items were stolen are eager to have them returned. Fortunes await adventurers willing to risk the magma, smoke, and teeth of Phosus's lair.

IS AND SUW, THE KNIVES OF BOREAS

Weapons (Is [rapier], Suw [shortsword]), very rare (require attunement)

These twin swords are made from iced steel in the cold forges of the Northlands. Their blades are pale blue and translucent and when unsheathed shed dim white light in a 20-foot radius around their wielder. Their pommels are freezing to the touch to any save those who are attuned to them. The blades become shrouded in strange runes when exposed to temperatures below freezing; the runes float away from the swords and fade from sight after a few feet.

Each of the blades is a *+2 weapon*. The wielder may freely choose to have the swords do cold damage instead of their normal damage type. Once each day, as a bonus action, the wielder may invoke the following:

Frozen Wrath of Boreas. For 1 minute, creatures who take damage from both blades in the same round must make a DC 14 Constitution save or be restrained until the end of their next turn.

VISIOS, THE BLINDFOLD OF CHARUN

Helm, very rare (requires attunement)

This length of shimmering black silk is adorned with small skulls embroidered in silver thread and tiny pearls. Unless wrapped around the eyes of an attuned creature, Visios whispers incoherently to creatures within 60 feet of it. The whispers are both menacing and soothing. The first time a creature hears the whispers, it must make a DC 10 Wisdom save or be frightened for 1d4 hours, after which it is immune to this effect.

A creature who is attuned to Visios and wraps the blindfold around its eyes gains Devil's Sight (as per the warlock's Eldritch Invocation). Once each day, as a reaction to the death of a creature within 60 feet, the bearer of Visios may open their spirit to the following:

Truth in Death. Learn one secret about the dying creature from its spirit as it dies. The GM determines the nature of the secret learned.

ALES, THE MIGHTY STEIN OF NINKASH

Wondrous item (beer stein), very rare (requires attunement)

Made from lacquered sandstone and cherry wood, this festive-looking drinking stein fills the space its bearer occupies with pungent alcoholic mist. Anyone adjacent to the bearer can smell the aroma. The handle of *Ales* is carved wood and portrays a dwarven fertility symbol with lustrous yellow hair. The cap is made from sandstone and gold and does not flip open for any save *Ales's* bearer. The stein is ever-filled with high-quality beer, and provided they drink from the stein each midday, the bearer gains +1 to Strength. The bearer of *Ales* may drain the stein once each day as a bonus action to gain the following:

Might of Nakash. For 1 minute, the bearer gains advantage on all Strength and Charisma ability checks. Additionally, creatures who take damage from a weapon attack of the bearer must succeed a DC 14 Strength save or be pushed 10 feet away from the bearer or knocked prone—bearer's choice.

MERCI, THE CHARMS OF LADA

Wondrous item (belt), very rare (requires attunement)

Twelve platinum charms hung upon a golden chain represent the sacred number of Lada, goddess of dawn love and mercy. Each charm is a repetition of the sacred eye of Lada, varying in size and color. The charms jingle softly as they move, though they can be silenced with a thought by their bearer. Worn at the waist, *Merci* glows brilliantly when exposed to the light of dawn and casts bright light in a 40-foot radius around its bearer for an hour after such an exposure. The bearer may cancel this effect at any time. Creatures touched by the light (including the bearer) recover one HD up to their maximum. Once each day as a bonus action, the bearer of Merci may use the following:

Rise Against Shadow. Magical darkness within 120 feet of the bearer is dispelled. All creatures of the bearer's choosing within 120 feet must succeed a DC 14 Dexterity save or be affected by *faerie fire* for 1 minute. This effect does not require concentration or the ability to cast spells.

EBOS, SHADOW GLOVES OF CHERNOBOG

Wondrous item (gloves), very rare (requires attunement)

Unworn, *Ebos* are an oily pair of leather work gloves that smell faintly of wood smoke and sulfur. They are stiff and cracked and entirely unattractive to the casual looker. When the bearer slides the gloves on for the first time during attunement, they are paralyzed for 1d4 hours as they experience visions of a twisted, shadowy landscape through which horrible creatures walk. Upon recovering, the bearer's maximum HD are reduced by 1. Becoming unattuned to the gloves restores the lost HD. While worn, the gloves appear as miasmic shadow in the vaguest hand-like shapes. While wearing the gloves, the bearer gains advantage to stealth checks. Once each day, as a bonus action, the bearer may cast *vampiric touch* upon themselves (3d6) using their proficiency and Charisma bonuses for the spell attack.

DRAGON TURTLES OF MIDGARD

AN INTERVIEW WITH A SAHUAGIN SCHOLAR

by Brian Suskind

> *"I tell you, mate. Our blades and ballista just bounced off the beast's shell! It's maw opened like the abyss itself, and with a single chomp, our rudder was bit clean away!"*
>
> —overheard at the Drunken Sail Tavern

Greetings Good Readers!

It is I, Jacopo de Zagora, professor, investigator and student of all that is. In this missive, I shall relate a fascinating discussion on dragon turtles, which I undertook in a port tavern along the windy docks of Triolo with K'abuleck, a sahuagin scholar of my acquaintance.

The Beginning

Ship's bane. Sailor's horror. You surfacers have many names for them. My people have different ones. Shelltooth, we call them. Or greatmaws. Call them what you will, dragon turtles are respected, feared and revered by all those who make their lives under or upon the water. And why wouldn't they be? With their nearly impervious shell, breath weapon, claws, and tail, the dragon turtle is surely one of the greatest aquatic foes.

A Description

Have you never seen one? Then count yourself lucky not to relive the nightmare when you close your eyes at night. I have seen them both above and below the water and managed to survive the experience. The first thing you notice is their shell. And a massive thing is it. Rough and studded with three rows of spiked plates, the shell is nearly the same greenish color as deep water making it very hard to see while below. Dragon turtles have taloned flippers for feet that propel them through the water at a speed that belies their great size. Their heads are more like dragons than turtles, a mouth of razor sharp teeth in an armored head complete with a crest of spines. And they have a long powerful tail for swimming and smashing.

On Their Nature and Habits

In general, dragon turtles are fiercely territorial and solitary creatures. They abide the company of their own race or other dragons begrudgingly and the presence of other races hardly at all. Now this does not include their own kin. A dragon turtle matron sometimes has one or two younger members of her clutch to boss around, but she will drive them away by the time they reach adulthood. Really the only time a dragon turtle allows another dragon turtle to enter their domain is during mating season. Lucky we are that this only happens once a decade or so, else we'd be in some greatmaw's belly!

A single dragon turtle claims vast tracks of open ocean as their domain, and pity any creature who dares intrude. Sometimes this can be over 50 square miles and includes above and below the waves, which is why your sailing ships occasionally run afoul of one of the shelltooths. Luckily for you surfacers, most of the dragon turtles in this part of the world reside in the Western Ocean.

Their lifespan is longer than any in the ocean, longer even than their draconic cousins. Some greatmaws are eons old. This gives them a strange perspective on life. They may hold a grudge against a country for some slight centuries in the past or defend a coastline due to an ancient treaty with a king long since gone to dust. The dragon turtles speak an oddly formal language melding words of both draconic and aquatic.

Much like the dragons, shelltooths collect valuables and tokens from their domains, usually items from interlopers they have killed or the wrecks of ships they have sunk, that sort of thing. They hoard these treasures in their lairs deep below the surface. What . . . ? No. No, the dragon turtles breathe both air and water, so typically their lairs are sea caves near the bottom of the sea. Now I've been inside a lair a time or two. The greatmaws can be reasoned with if you approach them right. The lairs that I have seen are decorated with their captured wealth and the shattered hulls of ships. Quite tasteful if you appreciate that sort of thing.

As I said, the dragon turtles will aggressively attack any interloper who dares enter their domain. But they can be convinced to allow you passage with a bit of bribe or tribute. Anyhow, folk like you and me are not the main part of their diet. While they eat anything that strikes their fancy, usually this is the biggest of the fish, like tuna, shark, sturgeon, and whales, but they also eat seaweed or other plants.

On Their Life Cycle

Much like other dragons, dragon turtles vary in size and strength, growing ever more powerful as they slowly age. Their hatchlings start off small, about the size of a dog, and are actually sort of cute. Born in clutches every decade or so, the newborns are left to their own devices, their mother having laid her eggs and moved on long ago. Most of the hatchlings do not survive to reach adulthood.

This is lucky, for at the other end of the current, the oldest, most ancient greatmaws are gargantuan or larger. Their jaws snap wood or bone as easily as kindling, and the scalding steam of their breath boils blood and sloughs skin. It can take centuries for a dragon turtle to reach adulthood and longer to become ancient. And all that time they are getting bigger, stronger and gaining new abilities, even picking up divine or arcane skills. I've even heard tell of one old shell who has taken to pretending to be a small island. Apparently, he enjoys the flavor of sea birds.

Notable Individuals and Groups

Storros the Sea Sage: The ancient one himself. Armada's Bane. Deep Oracle. Shelled Father. He has many names. Storros (N male dragon turtle wizard 12) is a massive, moss-green turtle with eldritch glyphs engraved into his shell. Though not normally known to attack ships, Storros has been known to intercept vessels to set matters along certain foretold paths. This may include imparting cryptic prophesies or demanding specific passengers be handed over to him. The domain of Storros the Sea Sage extends along the Eastern coast of Harkesh.

Jubaila, Priestess of the Waves: Though young for a dragon turtle, Jubaila (NG adult female dragon turtle cleric [Nethus] 7) earned great honor and respect for her dedication to her faith. During the sea god's recent

imprisonment, Jubaila prayed and fasted, ritually disfiguring her noble face with coral and stones until her features became twisted and scarred. At first, she believed her sacrifice was rewarded when Nethus was freed, but this initial impression has soured. Jubaila now believes that her beloved god has fallen under the sway of Hecate. She has vowed to find a "cure" for what ails the sea god.

Commander Agaha and the Deep Legion: This cadre of perhaps a dozen young and adult dragon turtles serves at the pleasure of the Imperial throne. Their mandate extends to vessel interception, coastal raids, and scouting and sentry duties. The current leader of the Deep Legion is Commander Agaha (N adult dragon turtle cleric [Seggotan] 6).

An Ending

So that is what I know about the greatmaws, my friend. If you wish to know more, you can enter the embrace of the sea and ask them yourself but I . . . I shall remain here and enjoy some more of this swill you surfacers call ale!

So was my conversation with K'abuleck, a sahuagin scholar in the Drunken Sail Tavern and what I have related to you is the truth! Or my name is not Jacopo de Zagora!

Some Hidden Lore about the Dragon Turtles of Midgard

Around 2,000 years ago, the Haizhu clan of dragon turtles exiled themselves from the Realm of the Jade Throne in Far Cathay. Where the other dragons of the Celestial Court saw wisdom in the new policy of cohabitation and cooperation with humans, the Haizhu saw only capitulation to lesser beings. Lead by Storros the Wise, as he was then called, the clan passed through a massive undersea portal and arrived in the Middle Sea.

For 1,700 years, the dragon turtles of the Middle Sea slowly grew in number, expanding out into the endless reaches of the Western Ocean. From one clan, the Haizhu eventually became a dozen or so competing clans of dragon turtles. Most live far out at sea and have little to no contact with the land-based civilizations of Midgard. The extended family of the original Haizhu still hold vast dominions in the Middle Sea and continue to be led by Storros. Honored for his divinations and wisdom, it was the Sea Sage who advised the great wyrm, Mharot the Founder, foretelling how the dragons might create their own kingdom.

Important Locations

The Eastward Arch: Far below the surface of the Middle Sea, a stone and crystal span rises up from the ocean floor forming a perfect arch. Of ancient age and unknown origin, the Eastward Arch is a portal connecting to an identical archway along the shore of Far Cathay. The activation of the arch is a closely guarded secret known only to only a handful (many of whom are dragons or dragon turtles). Those who even know of the arch suspect that the triggering component (or key) to activate the relic changes every 50 years. Even possessing the correct key is by far the easiest aspect of making use of the Eastward Arch. For the arch lies within sight of the lair of Storros the Sea Sage himself, and the area is strewn with guardians, traps, and fell magic. Even if someone were to learn the correct key, bypass all the obstacles, evade Storros, and activate the portal, it is more than likely that they would be met with guards from the Celestial Dragons of Cathay on the other side.

Shard Cay: Located far off in the Western Ocean, this circular stretch of sandy beach provides a vital link in the lifecycle of the dragon turtles. The cay has few trees and no surface water and presents a barren and utterly uninteresting picture. The only item of note is the exceptionally wide beaches. Yet once a decade or so, a female dragon turtle emerges from the waves to lay and bury her eggs. A closer inspection of the beach reveals thousands of broken egg shells, creating a hazardous terrain for non-dragon turtles.

Story Hooks

Find adventure on the waves:

- Word has reached the PCs of a dragon turtle's body washed ashore on a beach a few days from their location. Further, the shell of this great beast is studded with gemstones, some glowing with magical radiance. Unfortunately, the PCs are not the only ones to get this news, and a race is on to plunder the corpse.
- While sailing or walking along the coast, the PCs are confronted with Storros the Sea Sage. He has foreseen their involvement with a delicate situation and offers to pay them handsomely for interfering with the forbidden courtship between a sahuagin princess and a sea elf.
- The PCs ship is waylaid by a distraught dragon turtle who blames them for intruding on Shard Cay and stealing her eggs. The PCs have only a limited time to track down the true thieves (a band of piratical rakshasas) and return the eggs before they start hatching.

VARIANT UNDINE

by Shawn Merwin

The beautiful, destructive nature of water is represented by a tremendous variety of water creatures in Midgard. Some capture the tranquil elegance of a placid pond. Others encapsulate the terrible destruction of the hurricane. Somewhere between those two extremes are the undines, the fey manifestation of water in the form of waves, currents, and ripples.

Daughters of Nethus. Undines are considered the daughters of the chained god Nethus, Master of the Waves. While they may have originated in his demesne, the undines have spread far and wide, some moving from the oceans into the seas, to the bays, to the lakes, and finally to the ponds and rivers of Midgard. The further the undines travel from the oceans into less volatile waters, the weaker and more placid they become.

The Undinal Hierarchy. The most powerful of the undines are the ocean and sea undines whose personalities and powers are as forceful as the waves and who threaten even large sailing vessels. They jealously guard their homes at the bottom of the largest seas and oceans, treating most mortals who sail or swim above them as intruders. Such powerful undines are a force to be reckoned with.

The bay or lake undines are both smaller in stature and weaker in destructive power. They still use force to protect their underwater homes, but they are more likely to live harmoniously with nearby mortals. Lake undines, for example, have been known to rescue drowning children or animals that wander into the water from nearby settlements. Of course, when the mood strikes, they are equally likely to sell those rescued children to a fey lord or lady.

The weakest and most timid of the undines are the pond and river varieties. They keep to themselves, interacting with the mortal population only if forced by more powerful creatures that they might serve. They are likely to hide from passing strangers, relying on their guardians for protection.

Undine Lairs. Undine lairs are fully submerged, ranging from wide-open expanses on the ocean floor to small riverside caves. Most undines use water creatures as guards or pets: from vicious sharks for the ocean undines down to giant crayfish for the smaller river or pond undines. Undines favor precious gems such as diamonds and pearls as their wealth.

When are not patrolling their homes and tending their pets, they love to make art, especially music and sculpture. Undine songs, unlike the deadly ones of their siren cousins, are said to soothe the soul and leave the listener refreshed. Undine sculpture, created by the power of eroding water, is rarely spotted by mortal eyes but is said to be of surpassing beauty.

IN RIVERS AND PONDS

The least of the undines, those of rivers and ponds, rarely grow more than three feet tall. Their forms are draped in flowing sheets of water that act as clothing. They sport blue-green hair that ranges from short and mossy to long and stringy, like ropy seaweed.

These undines often rely on the local wildlife to protect them when creatures of the mortal realm threaten them and their lairs. Giant crabs and crayfish are their main protectors although sometimes river- or lake-dwelling mammals might also serve the undines. Beavers or muskrats often make their homes near a friendly undine.

Where these undines live, the natural world seems to flourish. Part of it is the magical nature of the fey creatures, but it also results from their active stewardship of the land.

RIVER/POND UNDINE

Small fey, chaotic neutral

Armor Class 13

Hit Points 27 (8d6 + 6)

Speed 20 ft., swim 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	16 (+3)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)	15 (+2)	16 (+3)

Skills Nature +3, Perception +4, Persuasion +5, Stealth +5

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 14

Languages Common, Aquan, Sylvan

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Amphibious. An undine can breathe air and water.

Actions

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) bludgeoning damage.

Chill Spray. The undine sprays a 10-foot cone of frigid water. Each creature in the cone must make a DC 13 Constitution saving throw, taking 7 (2d6) cold damage on a failed save, or half as much on a successful one.

Soothing Song. The undine target one living creature she can see within 30 feet of her. That creature must make a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw or become incapacitated. The creature can attempt a saving throw at the end of each of its turns to remove the effect.

IN BAYS AND LAKES

Undines of lakes and bays are more powerful than their pond-dwelling sisters, growing to five feet or more. And in temperament, they are much more fickle and volatile. Their expressive faces run the range from calm contemplation to twisted anger, sometimes at a moment's notice.

Undines of bays and lakes have grown used to their mortal neighbors, and some even make deals of trade or protection with locals. It is not unusual for an undine living in a lake near a farmstead to trade with the farming families. Raiding parties trying to get to a settlement by boat can run afoul of undines who agreed to guard the settlement's water route.

Undines of the lake or bay might call upon larger water creatures to protect them: dolphins, alligators, and the like. They are fiercely protective of their homes, rarely allowing a land-dwelling mortal to get near it. The few who have seen undine lairs and lived to tell the tale speak of it as if it's a dream: beautiful sculptures, mournful aquatic songs, and hollows of glittering gems.

BAY/LAKE UNDINE

Medium fey, chaotic neutral

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)

Hit Points 78 (12d8 + 24)

Speed 30 ft., swim 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)	11 (+0)	15 (+2)	16 (+3)

Skills Athletics +6, Perception +5, Stealth +5

Damage Resistances cold, fire

Condition Immunities petrified, prone

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 15

Languages Common, Aquan, Sylvan

Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Amphibious. An undine can breathe air and water.

Innate Spellcasting. The undine's innate spellcasting ability is Intelligence. It can innately cast the following spells, requiring no components.

At will: *friends, resistance*

3/day each: *acid arrow, blur, misty step*

1/day each: *hypnotic pattern*

Actions

Multiattack. The undine makes two slam attacks or two water plume attacks.

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) bludgeoning damage.

Water Plume. *Ranged Weapon Attack*: +7 to hit, range 120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d10 + 3) bludgeoning damage. The target must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

IN OCEANS AND SEAS

The largest and most powerful undines in Midgard are those of the oceans and seas, carrying the power of the crashing waves within them—a threat to entire vessels. When they appear above the surface, they stand eight feet tall with rippling muscles under watery skin, and their features resemble beautiful women clothed in patches of seaweed.

These undines are quick to anger. The mere presence of mortals in the waters around their homes drives them into a rage that is hard to quell. Without quick talking and persuasive reasoning, they are quick to smash vessels. Very few mortal sailors have encountered undine and lived to tell.

Rumors speak that these powerful undines are gathering forces and preparing to attack the Oracle of Kammae where their sire Nethas has been chained as a prisoner for decades. Only priestess Qorette Mardefon of Nethus knows for sure if this is true or not.

OCEAN/SEA UNDINES

Large fey, chaotic neutral

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)

Hit Points 136 (16d10 + 48)

Speed 20 ft., swim 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
19 (+4)	12 (+1)	16 (+3)	11 (+0)	14 (+2)	14 (+2)

Skills Athletics +7, Perception +5

Damage Immunities acid, cold, fire

Condition Immunities charmed, paralyzed, petrified, prone

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 15

Languages Common, Aquan, Sylvan

Challenge 8 (3,900 XP)

Amphibious. An undine can breathe air and water.

Innate Spellcasting. The undine's innate spellcasting ability is Intelligence. It can innately cast the following spells, requiring no components.

At will: *create/destroy water, fog cloud, thunderwave*

3/day each: *call lightning, enthrall, shatter*

1/day: *cone of cold, conjure elemental, mislead*

Actions

Multiattack. The undine makes three slam attacks.

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) bludgeoning damage.

Acid Geyser (Recharge 5-6). The undine sprays a 30-foot cone of corrosive water. Each creature in the cone must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw, taking 35 (10d6) acid damage on a failed save and being pushed 20 feet. On a successful saving throw, a target takes half damage and is not pushed.

TERRORS OF THE DRAGON EMPIRE

by James J. Haeck

The Mharoti Dragon Empire is the scourge of Midgard and the Southlands alike. The vast armies of the Dragon Empire march relentlessly across the known world in their endless wars of conquest, spreading fear and chaos wherever they go. The creatures that make up the Mharoti forces are powerful and frightful, ranging from deadly kobold ambushers mounted atop camouflaged drakes to elite companies of the finest dragonborn warriors Midgard has ever seen. Feared by the Mharoti and their enemies alike, these are the terrors of the Dragon Empire.

Baal's 1st Legion

The fires must be fed. So says the creed of Baal, lord of fire, master of sacrifice, and king of dragons. Few feed the flames of war as expertly as the triumphant soldiers of Baal's 1st Legion. Where most Mharoti imperial legions number close to ten thousand troops strong, Baal's 1st is a unit of one thousand of the empire's best soldiers, reserved only for strategic deployment against crucial military objectives.

Many of the soldiers in Baal's 1st were once members of adventuring parties or high-profile mercenary companies and are used to working in small units. The 1st Legion comprises one hundred "fellowships," each composed of ten soldiers. The commanders of these fellowships report to Korsiq Vraal, High Commander of the Legion. This way, the 1st Legion can act as a complete unit under Vraal's orders to overwhelm an enemy force or easily divide to attack with greater precision.

COMPOSITION

Baal's 1st Legion is one thousand soldiers strong—its ranks filled with kobolds, dragonborn, and a few assorted jambuka ("unscaled folk") who have gained favor in battle. The legion is composed of the following:

- 250 kobold light infantry (veterans with kobold racial traits).
- 200 kobold archers (veterans with kobold racial traits).
- 150 dragonborn cavalry (knights with red dragonborn racial traits riding warhorses).
- 100 dragonborn elementalists (mages with blue dragonborn racial traits).
- 100 dragonborn sky cavalry (**wyvern knights** with dragonborn racial traits riding war wyverns).
- 75 **desert giant** heavy infantry (see *Tome of Beasts*).
- 75 **kobold alchemists** (see *Tome of Beasts*).
- 25 **naina** spies (see *Tome of Beasts*).

- 25 half-red dragon veterans.
- Command Company (ten elite members of the 1st Legion, see below).

COMMAND COMPANY

Baal's 1st Legion is led by High Commander Korsiq Vraal, but Vraal is also the head of a fellowship of his own. The members of this elite force are heroes of the Dragon Empire, and their appearance on the battlefield can snatch victory from the jaws of defeat, not least of all because Vraal commands the incredible might of a fully grown flame dragon. Its members include the following:

- General Korsiq Vraal, LN male silver winged dragonborn (see below), fellowship commander. Keeps a **crimson drake** perched on his shoulder (see *Tome of Beasts*).
- Teryth, LN female adult **flame dragon** (see *Tome of Beasts*), artillery. Owes Vraal a mysterious life-debt.
- Blind-Eye, N male **ravenfolk doom croaker** (see *Tome of Beasts*), tactician. Claims to see the future.
- "The Blackscale Triplets," Kree, Lail, and Blim, CN female **kobold alchemists** (see *Tome of Beasts*), demolitionists.
- Haddad of the Forge, LN male **efreeti**, armorer and priest of Baal. Cremates fallen foes.
- Nimyu, CE female **naina** (see *Tome of Beasts*), spy/counterspy. Prefers to remain in her guise as an elderly human woman.
- Lord Wasim al-Gizmiri, LG male red dragonborn **wyvern knight**, scout. Vain but dutiful; scion of Ateshah, great wyrm of flame.
- Amirah of the Blade, CN female human *assassin* with 120 hit points, peerless swordswoman. Mysterious desert wanderer, became famous as an undefeatable prize fighter. Wields an enchanted scimitar of speed.

KORSIQ VRAAL

Medium humanoid (silver dragonborn), lawful neutral

Armor Class 21 (*+1 mithral plate, spellguard shield*)

Hit Points 136 (16d8 + 64)

Speed 30 ft., fly 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	12 (+1)	18 (+4)	10 (+0)	17 (+3)	18 (+4)

Saving Throws Wis +8, Cha +9

Skills Perception +8

Damage Resistances cold

Condition Immunities charmed

Senses passive Perception 18

Languages Common, Draconic

Challenge 14 (11,500 XP)

Aura of Devotion. Korsiq Vraal and friendly creatures within 10 feet of him cannot be charmed while he is conscious.

Blazing Smite. When Korsiq Vraal hits a creature with a melee weapon attack, he may expend one of his spell slots to deal additional fire damage. The extra damage is 3d8 for a 1st-level spell slot, plus 1d8 for each spell level higher than 1st, to a maximum of 6d8. The damage increases by 1d8 if the target is an undead or a fiend.

Dragonbreath Torque. Korsiq Vraal wears a silver torque that doubles the damage of his breath weapon (already included). It requires attunement by a dragonborn.

Spellguard Shield. While holding this shield, Korsiq Vraal has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects, and spell attacks have disadvantage against him.

Spellcasting. Korsiq Vraal is a 16th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 17, +9 to hit with spell attacks). He has the following paladin spells prepared:

1st level (4 slots): *bless, cure wounds, heroism, shield of faith*

2nd level (3 slots): *branding smite, lesser restoration, locate object*

3rd level (3 slots): *dispel magic, remove curse, revivify*

4th level (2 slots): *banishment, death ward*

Actions

Multiattack. Korsiq Vraal makes 3 melee attacks.

Flame Tongue Longsword. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d8 + 5) slashing damage, or 10 (1d10 + 5) slashing damage if wielded with both hands, plus 11 (2d6 + 1d8) fire damage.

Cleansing Touch. Korsiq Vraal ends one spell on himself or a willing creature that he touches. He can use this action 4 times, regaining expended uses when he finishes a long rest.

Cold Breath (Recharges after a Short or Long Rest). Korsiq Vraal exhales an icy blast in a 15-foot cone. Each creature in that area must make a DC 17 Constitution saving throw, taking 35 (10d6) cold damage on a failed save or half as much on a successful one.

REACTIONS

Protection. When a creature Korsiq Vraal can see attacks a target that is within 5 feet of it, he can use a reaction to impose disadvantage on the attack roll. He must be holding a shield.

Mharoti Kobolds

Kobolds are the largest single racial group in the Mharoti army, and just as wild kobolds unquestioningly serve mighty dragons, so too do these civilized kobolds serve the mighty Dragon Empire. Most kobolds legionnaires are mere infantry, using **kobold** stats—with kobolds in especially well-supplied corps wearing scale armor (AC 16) and wielding spears: +4 to hit, *Hit*: 5 (1d6 + 2) piercing damage.

More specialized kobold regiments employ **kobold scouts** and **kobold ambushers**, both of which are trained to operate with a **camouflage drake**. Kobold scouts are trained in the art of moving unseen on drakeback over large stretches of land. When stealth fails, these scouts are adept at fighting on the run. Unlike typical kobold warriors, these scouts are trained to operate individually or in very small groups. As such, they aren't used to fighting in packs like other kobolds. Even without their drake mounts, most kobold scouts are blessed with the gift of flight, and can use their wings to travel great distances.

Kobold ambushers also employ stealth to deadly effect, preferring to lay in wait for hours or days at a time. Ambushers also typically operate in units of ten or more, using their numbers and their pack tactics to devastate their targets even after the initial ambush. While these advantages make them formidable combatants even without the element of surprise, these kobolds rarely try to salvage a failed ambush, preferring to scatter in all directions and meet up at a predetermined rendezvous point.

Camouflage drakes are squat, sand-colored quadrupeds with tiny, vestigial wings incapable of lifting their muscular forms. Despite lacking the ability to fly, these drakes can change color to blend in with their environment and can run as fast as a horse at its top speed. These bestial creatures lack the shrewd cunning of true dragons but are still intelligent enough to work in perfect tandem with their kobold rider.

KOBOLD SCOUT

Small humanoid (kobold), lawful evil

Armor Class 16 (studded leather)

Hit Points 22 (4d6 + 8)

Speed 30 ft., fly 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
9 (−1)	18 (+4)	14 (+2)	9 (−1)	16 (+3)	8 (−1)

Saving Throws Dex +6

Skills Perception +8, Stealth +6

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 18

Languages Common, Draconic

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Cunning Action. On each of its turns, the kobold scout can use a bonus action to take the Dash, Disengage, or Hide action.

Skirmishing. The kobold scout deals an extra 14 (4d6) damage whenever it hits a target with a weapon attack on its turn, and has moved at least 30 feet that turn. This includes movement made while mounted.

Stealthy Traveler. The kobold scout can move stealthily at a normal pace while traveling overland.

Actions

Shortsword. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage.

Shortbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack*: +6 to hit, range 80/360 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage.

KOBOLD AMBUSHER

Small humanoid (kobold), lawful evil

Armor Class 12

Hit Points 7 (3d6 − 3)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
7 (−2)	16 (+3)	9 (−1)	8 (−1)	10 (+0)	8 (−1)

Skills Perception +2, Stealth +7

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 12

Languages Common, Draconic

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Assassinate. During its first turn, the kobold ambusher has advantage on attack rolls against any creature that hasn't taken a turn. Any hit the ambusher scores against a surprised creature is a critical hit.

Camouflage. The kobold ambusher has advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks made to avoid being seen on a turn in which it has not moved. If it does not move for at least 1 minute, it cannot be seen unless directly interacted with. This effect ends if the ambusher moves.

Pack Tactics. The kobold ambusher has advantage on an attack roll against a creature if at least one of the ambusher's allies is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

Sneak Attack. The kobold ambusher deals an extra 7 (2d6) damage when it hits a target with a weapon attack and has advantage on the attack roll, or when the target is within 5 feet of an ally of the spy that isn't incapacitated and the ambusher doesn't have disadvantage on the attack roll.

Actions

Dagger. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack*: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) piercing damage.

CAMOUFLAGE DRAKE

Medium dragon, neutral evil

Armor Class 14 (natural armor)

Hit Points 38 (5d8 + 15)

Speed 50 ft., burrow 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	5 (−3)	12 (+1)	5 (−3)

Skills Stealth +6

Damage Resistances cold, fire, lightning

Senses tremorsense 20 ft., passive Perception 11

Languages —

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Camouflage. The camouflage drake has advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks made to avoid being seen on a turn in which it has not moved. If it does not move for at least 1 minute, it cannot be seen unless directly interacted with. This effect ends if the drake moves.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The camouflage drake makes two attacks: one with its bite and one with its claws.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d6 + 1) piercing damage.

Claws. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (2d4 + 1) slashing damage.

YEK DEMONS

by Jeremy Hochhalter

With flattened, lupine faces and skin pulled taught over skeletal frames, the bulging bellies of yek seem to churn as though their prey still lives inside them. Wearing entrails and bones of previous victims over their dark red fur, black spikes jutting from their spines, yek are terrible to behold.

Yek are loathsome fiends, hated by other demons because of their cannibalistic tendencies. They are creatures that do not care what flesh they feed upon but prefer it to be raw and wriggling. Though vicious fighters alone, they are rarely encountered without their pack. Even the most powerful of fiends can be brought down by a pack of yek.

In a controversial move, the armies of the Dragon Empire have begun using yek as shock troops, summoning the fiends behind enemy lines and letting them do their dirty work.

DEMON, YEK

Small fiend, chaotic evil

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)
Hit Points 99 (18d6 + 36)
Speed 30 ft., climb 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	16 (+3)	15 (+2)	19 (+4)	13 (+1)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Str +7, Dex +7, Con +6, Int +8
Skills Perception +5, Stealth +7
Damage Resistances cold, fire, lightning; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from non-magical damage
Damage Immunities poison
Condition Immunities poisoned
Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 15
Languages Abyssal, telepathy 120 ft.
Challenge Rating 9 (5,000 XP)

Devouring Swarm. If a creature has three or more yek attached to it from a bite attack at the end of its turn, the creature must succeed on a DC 17 Constitution saving throw or suffer from 1d4 Constitution damage as the demons feast upon the creature's flesh.

Magic Resistance. The yek has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Pack Tactics. The yek has advantage on an attack roll against a creature if at least one of the yek's allies is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The yek makes one bite attack and two claw attacks. It may make a bone shard attack in place of a claw attack if it chooses and has a bone shard available.

Bite. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 20 (5d6 + 3) piercing damage. On a successful hit, the demon latches on and begins to gnaw on the target (escape DC 17). The yek cannot make a bite attack if already attached but automatically deals bite damage at the end of its turn if it is latched on to a target.

Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (3d4 + 3) slashing damage.

Bone Shard. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d4 + 3) piering damage. On a successful hit, the bone breaks into splinters in the target's wound. The target takes 5 (2d4) piercing damage at the end of its turn as long as the bone remains lodged in its wound. A successful DC 15 Medicine (Wisdom) check or magical healing halts the ongoing damage.

A yek typically carries 3 (1d6+1) of these weapons, which are destroyed on a successful attack. It may use its action to tear a bone from a nearby corpse.

DREAD SPAWN OF THE WASTED WEST

by Kelly Pawlik

The Wasted West is host to myriad dangers, from the tribes of dust goblins to vicious sentient plants to the ravening undead that seem to be everywhere. Best known of this region's hazards, however, are the Dread Walkers, the alien Great Old Ones summoned in the final days of the Great Mage Wars by wizards unaware of the ruin their hubris would bring. The Walkers sleepwalk now, time-trapped for the time being, largely unable to affect Midgard directly, but their legacy remains, and some of them have spawned new horrors upon the Mortal Realm.

The dread spawn presented here are just a few examples of the enduring ruin the Dread Walkers have wrought upon Midgard. These creatures are not all malicious, and they are rarely clever, but like their progenitors, their existence is an affront to nature itself, and they must be expunged by any stout-hearted person who values freedom and sanity.

Grimmlet

A jagged shard of smoky translucent crystal, approximately the size and mass of a housecat, hovers before you. Despite its seeming lack of interest in anything that lies around it, something about the creature's non-symmetrical appearance feels offensive to the natural order.

Born of the Void. Grimmlets arrive in the Mortal Realm from the same portion of the Far Reaches that spawned the Waste Walker Kb'r'ck of Crystal. Grimmlets were named in honor of the unfortunate tracker who discovered them, Aleksei Grimmczyk, who did not survive this initial meeting but whose demise was recounted by his friend, the elfmarked mage Alethrie

Strange Families. A grimmlet's method of reproduction, creating near clones of itself when injured by arcane energy, can cause them to quickly gather in large familial

GRIMMLETS AND KB'R'CK OF CRYSTAL

It is unknown by mortals if grimmlets have any relationship at all to Kb'r'ck, or if they communicate with the Walker in any fashion. In truth, all grimmlets are a type of sensor that project everything they experience back to their crystalline progenitor. What the inscrutable Kb'r'ck does with the information being transmitted while it is time-trapped is impossible to know.

swarms. Strangely, a grimmlet can only swarm with other grimmlets created from the same progenitor grimmlet and with the progenitor itself, and after about an hour, these swarms disperse and move away from each other to create new swarms through magic injury.

Whispering Menace. Grimmlets do not speak. In fact, they never communicate with other creatures via any known form of language or telepathy. The air around a grimmlet, however, mutters and whispers at all times in a foul-sounding invocation. When the creature uses its innate magic, these whispers rise in volume slightly, giving canny listeners a split-second warning that something, likely unpleasant, is about to occur.

GRIMMLET

Tiny monstrosity, unaligned

Armor Class 11

Hit Points 52 (15d4 + 15)

Speed 0 ft., fly 30 ft. (hover)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (−1)	12 (+1)	13 (+1)	3 (−4)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)

Damage Immunities psychic

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical weapons.

Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, deafened, petrified, poisoned, stunned, unconscious

Senses blindsense 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages —

Challenge 1/2 (100 XP)

Innate Spellcasting. The grimmlet's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 12). It can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

3/day each: *maddening whispers**

At will: *crushing curse*, minor illusion*

Reproduce. If the grimmlet is dealt damage by a spell that does not reduce it to 0 hit points, a number of new grimmlets equal to the level of the spell slot used to cast the spell are created in the nearest empty spaces to the injured grimmlet. If the grimmlet is injured by a spell cast using innate spellcasting, the number of new grimmlets created is equal to the level of the spell cast. Grimmlets injured by cantrips or at-will innate spells create one new grimmlet.

Sixteen or more grimmlets within 30 feet of each other become a **grimmlet swarm**.

ACTIONS

Crystal Edge. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 3 (1d4 + 1) slashing damage and an additional 1 psychic damage.

REACTIONS

Self Destruct. When the grimmlet is reduced to 0 hit points, it explodes in a spray of void-infused crystal shards that deals 3 (1d6) slashing damage and 3 (1d6) psychic damage to all creatures within 5 feet of it. Creatures that make a DC 12 Dexterity saving throw avoid taking the slashing damage.

GRIMMLET SWARM

Flowing over the landscape like a glass carpet, this mass of smoky crystalline shards moves in a manner most unnatural. Occasionally, a bolt of black or purple energy arcs between two or more of the shards in the swarm.

GRIMMLET SWARM

Large swarm of Tiny monstrosities, unaligned

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points 199 (21d10 + 84)

Speed 0 ft., fly 30 ft. (hover)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	12 (+1)	19 (+4)	3 (−4)	10 (+0)	18 (+4)

Damage Immunities psychic

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical weapons.

Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, deafened, petrified, poisoned, stunned, unconscious

Senses blindsense 120 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages —

Challenge 10 (5,900 XP)

Innate Spellcasting. The grimmlet swarm's innate spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 16, +8 to hit with spell attacks). It can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

1/day each: *hallucinatory terrain*

3/day each: *hypnotic pattern, major image, void strike**

At will: *crushing curse (as 11th-level cantrip)*, maddening whispers*, minor illusion*

Reproduce. If the grimmlet swarm is dealt damage by a spell that does not reduce it to 0 hit points, a number of new grimmlets equal to the level of the spell slot used to cast the spell are created in the nearest empty spaces to the injured grimmlet swarm. If the grimmlet swarm is injured by a spell cast using innate spellcasting, the number of new grimmlets created is equal to the level of the spell cast. Grimmlet swarms injured by cantrips or at-will innate spells create one new grimmlet.

New grimmlets created by the grimmlet swarm are not subsumed into the swarm. They instead form a new swarm once sixteen or more new grimmlets have been created.

Maze of Edges. A creature that attempts to move out of or through the grimmlet swarm must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw or take 19 (3d10 + 3) slashing damage.

Shroud of Whispers. As a bonus action, the grimmlet swarm can cast crushing curse* or maddening whispers* on all creatures that share its space.

Swarm. The grimmlet swarm can occupy another creature's space and vice versa, and the swarm can move through any opening large enough for a single grimmlet. The swarm can't regain hit points or gain temporary hit points.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The grimmlet swarm makes three attacks with its crystal edges.

Crystal Edges. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +7 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 19 (3d10 + 3) slashing damage and 20 (3d10 + 4) psychic damage.

REACTIONS

Enervating Maelstrom. When the grimmlet swarm is reduced to 0 hit points, it explodes in a plume of ennui that deals 42 (12d6) psychic damage and 1d3 levels of exhaustion to all creatures within 20 feet of it. Creatures that make a DC 16 Dexterity saving throw take only half of the psychic damage and one level of exhaustion.

*See also *Deep Magic: Void Magic.*

Orniraptor

A clumsy-looking flightless bird with a short conical beak, no feathers or skin stares blankly with its single eye. Its organs are held in place by a slimy transparent membrane.

Nearly Mindless. Orniraptors are creatures of pure instinct and share many traits in common with the basest vermin rather than beasts. They attack anything that moves and attempt to peck off pieces small enough to fit into their too-small beaks.

Troublesome Pests. Unlike some of the other dread spawn, orniraptors tend to be more troublesome than dangerous due to their persistence in striking at anything that moves. They can become deadly, however, if a large number of them start moving in the same direction.

Quiet Yet Loud. Orniraptors have no vocal organs and simply squawk soundlessly as they move about. Their movements tend to be jerky and clumsy however, so the creatures tend to be quite audible as they move about.

ORNIRAPTOR

Small monstrosity, unaligned

Armor Class 13

Hit Points 33 (6d6 + 12)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)	2 (−4)	7 (−2)	8 (−1)

Senses passive Perception 8

Language —

Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

Collective Perception. An orniraptor is aware of everything for which every other orniraptor within 20 feet of it is aware of.

Poor Vision. An orniraptor's visual acuity is based on movement, so creatures that don't move or act on their turn are invisible to them. Their collective perception can negate this penalty.

ACTIONS

Peck. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 4 (1d6 + 1) piercing damage.

Spit Stone. *Ranged Weapon Attack*: +3 to hit, reach 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 3 (1d4 + 1) bludgeoning damage.

REACTIONS

Blood Spurt. A creature that deals piercing or slashing damage to an orniraptor must make a DC 11 Dexterity saving throw or take 3 (1d6) points of acid damage as it is struck by the creature's caustic blood.

Parzz'val

Six legs, ending in massive, three-fingered humanoid hands, support a headless horse-like torso. The front of this creature's mass opens into a huge tripartite maw filled with jagged, web-shrouded ridges, dripping a caustic substance.

Failed Experiments. Parzz'vals are created by the treacherous wizard enkada pishtuhk in his efforts to recreate a version of pah'draguusthlai the devourer in a form beholden to and controlled by him. Thus far, his attempts have failed. No matter what form or features his creations take at their birth, they twist into a parzz'val over the course of a week or less. To date, enkada has been unable to even create a form of parzz'val controllable by his magic and has sent each of these failed creations out into the wasted west to wreak havoc.

Bottomless Hunger. A parzz'val has enough intelligence to reason and problem-solve, but they are largely guided by their monstrous appetites. Witnesses to the aftermath of a parzz'val attack claim to have seen one of the gluttonous creatures consume two horses and at least a dozen adult men in the space of an hour. Parzz'vals prefer live prey but are not above eating carrion if their preferred meal isn't available.

Ambush Hunters. Despite, or perhaps because of, their enormous hunger, parzz'vals are excellent at taking their prey by surprise. Coloration between parzz'vals varies slightly, but they trend toward sandy browns and stony greys. A parzz'val can wait patiently for hours for the ideal time to strike if they anticipate a meal awaits as a reward.

PARZZ'VAL

Large aberration, chaotic evil

Armor Class 15

Hit Points 178 (17d10 + 85)

Speed 50 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
21 (+5)	16 (+3)	20 (+5)	5 (-3)	10 (+0)	7 (−2)

Saving Throws Con +7

Skills Stealth +6

Damage Vulnerabilities thundering

Damage Immunities acid; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical weapons.

Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, unconscious

Senses blindsense 120 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages Void Speech

Challenge 8 (3,900 XP)

Caustic Web (Recharge 5–6). As a bonus action, the parzz'val can carpet a 10-foot square with sticky, acidic webbing to a height of 3 feet. The webbing is considered difficult terrain. A creature standing in the webbing at the start of its turn takes 18 (4d8) acid damage or half that if it succeeds at a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw. The webs persist for 1 minute before collapsing. The parzz'val's movement is unaffected by the webs it or other parzz'vals create.

Pummel. If the parzz'val deals damage to a creature with four melee attacks in one round, it has advantage on all melee attacks it makes against that creature in the next round.

Regeneration. The parzz'val regains 10 hit points at the start of its turn. If the parzz'val takes thundering damage, this trait doesn't function at the start of its next turn. The parzz'val only dies if it starts its turn with 0 hit points and does not regenerate.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The parzz'val makes four oversized fist attacks.

Oversized Fist. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +8 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 14 (2d8 + 5) bludgeoning damage.

Oversized Maw. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +8 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 18 (2d12 + 5) piercing damage.

REACTIONS

Swallow Whole. If the parzz'val deals damage to a Medium or smaller creature with its oversized maw attack, the creature must succeed on a DC 16 Strength or Dexterity saving throw or be swallowed by the parzz'val.

While swallowed, the creature is blinded and restrained, it has total cover against attacks and effects outside the parzz'val, and it takes 36 (8d8) acid damage at the start of the parzz'val's turns. If the parzz'val takes 30 damage or more from a creature inside it, the parzz'val must succeed on a DC 20 Constitution saving throw at the end of that turn or regurgitate the swallowed creature, which falls prone into a space within 10 feet of the parzz'val. If the parzz'val dies, the swallowed creature is no longer restrained by it and can escape from the corpse by using 15 feet of movement, falling prone.

Vangsluagh

A writhing mass of hundreds of rubbery, blue-grey tentacles rises from a human-sized pair of legs ending in elephantine feet. Each tentacle ends in an eerily human looking mouth.

Apocalypse Children. Creatures maddened in the shadow of Uthul-Vangslagish eventually transform into vangsluagh, the doom-singing, wandering heralds of their dread parent. Vangsluagh wander the lands of the Wasted West, spreading discord whenever they come into contact with mortals. Some sages contend that Uthul-Vangslagish will call all of its children home when it is time to end the world with its song.

Damned Pipers. Vangsluagh create a din everywhere they go; the mouths on their tentacles perpetually scream, whistle, bleat, growl, and cry. Even in instances where a vangsluagh may want a quiet entrance or stealthy ambush, their own bodies betray them. Stories have emerged from the wastes, however, of vangsluagh that are capable of silencing the noise surrounding them.

Defilers of Beauty. Vangsluagh despise pretty things, be they creature, object, or structure. Given the opportunity, a vangsluagh prefers spending its time smashing beautiful things to bits. The absence of beauty doesn't necessarily calm these creatures however; they target living creatures as a priority in these occurrences.

VANGSLUAGH

Medium aberration, chaotic evil

Armor Class 13

Hit Points 110 (13d8 + 52)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	17 (+3)	18 (+4)	10 (+0)	10 (+0)	16 (+3)

Damage Immunities thundering

Condition Immunities deafened

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages Void Speech

Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Cacophony. The vangsluagh constantly emits a din of bleats, trills, and trumpets. A creature that casts a spell while it is within 30 feet of the vangsluagh must make a DC 13 Intelligence, Wisdom, or Charisma saving throw. (The type of saving throw required is dependent on the spellcasting creature's spellcasting ability score.) On a failed save, the spell is not cast, and the spell slot used is not expended. Additionally, a creature within 30 feet of the vangsluagh that is maintaining concentration on a spell must make a DC 13 Constitution saving throw. Failing the saving throw prevents the creature from maintaining concentration.

Constant Racket. The vangsluagh has disadvantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The vangsluagh makes two tentacle lash attacks.

Tentacle Lash. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +5 to hit, reach 10 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d8 + 3) bludgeoning damage.

VANGSLUAGH AND UTHUL-VANGSLAGISH, THE SHRIEKING MOUNTAIN

Vangsluagh are created from their parent, Uthul-Vangslagish, in some inscrutable and horrid biological fashion. These creatures feel something for their parent, and despite their alignment, vangsluagh can be found in the shadow of the Dread Walker, violently protecting it from creatures that would approach it.

Sonic Bullet. Ranged Magic Attack: +5 to hit, range 120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 17 (4d6 + 3) thundering damage, and the target must make a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or be deafened until the beginning of the vangsluagh's next turn.

Agonizing Trill (Recharge After a Short or Long Rest). The vangsluagh increases the pitch of its cacophony to deadly levels. All creatures within 30 feet of the vangsluagh take 35 (10d6) points of thundering damage and are stunned for 1 minute. A creature that makes a DC 13 Constitution saving throw halves the amount of thundering damage it takes and negates the stunned condition. A stunned creature can repeat the saving throw at the end of each of its turns and negates the condition on a success.

KD '12

HAUNTED STONE GIANT

by Richard Green

This stone giant appears dead-eyed and sullen, trudging along as if the weight of the entire world rests on his shoulders. Three huge ghostly figures swirl around the giant who looks at them with a mixture of fear and loathing.

By adolescence, most male hill and stone giants of the Haunted Lands are plagued by the spirits of their ancestors. The ghosts' incessant whispers drive them off alone or in small familial groups to lay their ancestors' remains to rest. This can consume their lives to the extent that even breeding isn't a priority, so the giants' own ancestors drive their race toward extinction. The more who die, the more ghosts return to burden the living, leading many tribes to cremate their dead—though this is considered a vile act of desecration by many giants.

This ghostly harassment manifests as a type of phantom known as an ancestral spirit. These spirits are anchored to the souls of their descendants and appear near their host either as dark, flickering shades or as looming, spectral apparitions. The giant will take steps to defend its ancestral spirits if they are attacked but will likely be glad at the temporary respite if the spirits are driven off. Spirits return to plague their briefly relieved ancestors at the rate of one spirit per hour. They cannot be destroyed permanently unless their bones are found and laid to rest.

HAUNTED STONE GIANT

Huge giant, chaotic neutral

Armor Class 20 (natural armor, ancestral spirits)
Hit Points 126 (11d12 + 55)
Speed 40 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
23 (+6)	15 (+2)	20 (+5)	10 (+0)	12 (+1)	6 (−2)

Saving Throws Dex +5, Con +8, Wis +4
Skills Athletics +12, Perception +4
Condition Immunities charmed, frightened (see below)
Senses darkvision 60 ft., see invisibility (see below); passive Perception 14
Languages Giant
Challenge 8 (3,900 XP)

Ancestral Spirits. Three ghostly spirits haunt the giant. The spirits are incorporeal, remain within 10 ft. of the giant at all times, and cannot take actions. Each uses the giant's AC and saving throws, has 15 hit points and can only be harmed by radiant damage. If an ancestral spirit is reduced to 0 hit points, it disappears temporarily. Reduce the giant's AC by 1 and remove one trait granted by the spirits for each spirit that is driven off. Ancestral spirits cannot be turned.

Reckless. At the start of its turn, the giant can gain advantage on all melee weapon attack rolls during that turn, but attack rolls against it have advantage until the start of its next turn. This trait is granted by the ancestral spirits.

See Invisibility. The giant can see invisible creatures and objects as if they were visible and can see into the Ethereal Plane. This trait is granted by the ancestral spirits.

Steadfast. The giant is immune to the charmed and frightened conditions. This trait is granted by the ancestral spirits.

Stone Camouflage. The giant has advantage on Dexterity (Stealth) checks made to hide in rocky terrain.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The giant makes two greatclub attacks.

Greatclub. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +9 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 19 (3d8 + 6) bludgeoning damage.

Rock. *Ranged Weapon Attack*: +9 to hit, range 60/240 ft., one target. *Hit:* 28 (4d10 + 6) bludgeoning damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 17 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

REACTIONS

Rock Catching. If a rock or similar object is hurled at the giant, the giant can, with a successful DC 10 Dexterity saving throw, catch the missile and take no bludgeoning damage from it.

LESSER GOLEMS: IT'S ALIVE!

by Shawn Merwin

The small creatures emerging from the alley first looked like dogs, but as they crept into the lamplight, their awkward, lurching movements showed they were animated constructs of hair, bone, glass, and other common materials found throughout the city.

While their larger and more dangerous cousins are made of clay, flesh, iron, or stone, the smaller members of the lesser golem varieties are made of more common and less expensive materials. The magic that gives them power is less monumental than their more exotic brethren, but they still contain enough arcane energy to pose a threat to inexperienced adventurers.

An Arcane Blueprint. Like other golems, the lesser golems cannot be created without a magical blueprint, typically found in an arcane tomb known as a manual of golems. Because lesser golems are less powerful and require less time, gold, and material than their larger counterparts, a *manual of the lesser golem* is easier to find and might be held in a scroll or other writing medium rather than an ornate and treasured tome.

Spirit-Driven Trash. After building the body of the lesser golem in accordance with the instructions provided in the *manual of the lesser golem*, the creator must perform the extensive (and sometimes costly) rituals to animate their creation.

The bodies of lesser golems need not be created with the same precision and expertise as other golems, which reduces the cost of making them. In fact, they are usually fragile even in the best of circumstances, so practitioners of lesser golem creation generally spend little time crafting the physical forms.

Manual of the Lesser Golem

Wondrous item, rare

A *manual of the lesser golem* could be found in a book, on a scroll, etched into a piece of stone or metal, or scribed on any other medium that holds words, runes, and arcane inscriptions. Each *manual of the lesser golem* describes the materials needed and the process to be followed to create one type of lesser golem. The GM chooses the type of lesser golem detailed in the manual, or determines the golem type randomly.

To decipher and use the manual, you must be a spellcaster with at least one 2nd-level spell slot. You must also succeed on a DC 10 Intelligence (Arcana) check at the start of the first day of golem creation. If you fail the check, you must wait at least 24 hours to restart the creation process, and you also take 3d6 psychic damage that can only be recovered through natural means (hit dice expended or after a long rest).

The lesser golems created via a *manual of the lesser golem* are not immortal. The magic that keeps them intact weakens until the lesser golems finally fall apart. Lesser golems last twice the number of days it takes to create them (see below) before losing their power.

Once the golem is created, the power held within the manual is expended, making the writing worthless and incapable of creating another.

D20	GOLEM	TIME	COST
1–7	Hair	2 days	100 gp
8–13	Mud	5 days	500 gp
14–17	Glass	10 days	2,000 gp
18–20	Wood	15 days	20,000 gp

GOLEM, GLASS

Small construct, unaligned

Armor Class 12
Hit Points 40 (10d6 + 10)
Speed 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	15 (+2)	13 (+1)	3 (−4)	8 (−1)	1 (−5)

Damage Vulnerabilities bludgeoning
Damage Resistances piercing and slashing
Damage Immunities poison, psychic
Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 9
Languages understands the language of its creator but can't speak
Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Immutable Form. The golem is immune to any spell or effect that would alter its form.

Actions

Shard. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (2d6 + 2) slashing damage.

Reactions

Shatter. When a glass golem takes bludgeoning damage, it can make a shard attack against all adjacent creatures that it chooses.

GOLEM, HAIR

Small construct, unaligned

Armor Class 13
Hit Points 13 (3d6 + 3)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	17 (+3)	13 (+1)	3 (−4)	8 (−1)	1 (−5)

Damage Vulnerabilities slashing
Damage Resistances piercing
Damage Immunities bludgeoning, psychic
Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 9
Languages understands the language of its creator but can't speak
Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

Immutable Form. The golem is immune to any spell or effect that would alter its form.

Actions

Lash. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) slashing damage. The target must succeed on a DC 9 Dexterity saving throw or be tripped prone.

GOLEM, MUD

Small construct, unaligned

Armor Class 10
Hit Points 27 (6d6 + 6)
Speed 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
15 (+2)	10 (+0)	13 (+1)	3 (−4)	8 (−1)	1 (−5)

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical weapons
Damage Immunities poison, psychic
Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 9
Languages understands the language of its creator but can't speak
Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Immutable Form. The golem is immune to any spell or effect that would alter its form.

Actions

Multiattack. The mud golem makes two slam attacks.

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) bludgeoning damage.

Mud Ball. *Ranged Weapon Attack*: +2 to hit, range 50 ft., one target. *Hit:* 3 (1d6) bludgeoning damage, and the target is blinded until the start of its turn.

GOLEM, WOOD

Medium construct, unaligned

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)

Hit Points 52 (8d8 + 16)

Speed 20 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	10 (+0)	15 (+2)	3 (-4)	10 (+0)	1 (-5)

Damage Vulnerabilities fire

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical weapons that aren't adamantine

Damage Immunities poison, psychic

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 10

Languages understands the language of its creator but can't speak

Challenge 4 (1100 XP)

Immutable Form. The golem is immune to any spell or effect that would alter its form.

Magic Resistance. The wood golem has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Actions

Multiattack. The wood golem makes two slam attacks.

Slam. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) bludgeoning damage.

JEFF
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PECH: SERVANTS OF STONE

by Shawn Merwin

Natives to the Elemental Plane of Earth, the stalwart and humble pech often cross to the Prime Material Planes to escape threats in their homeland, seek valuable gems and ore, or serve masters in the formation of great stone creations. They also trade with topsiders to obtain new stoneworking equipment, and they have a strong affinity for the ale that they cannot brew themselves.

Physical Features. Pech are small in size, slightly taller and stronger than deep gnomes. Their long arms and legs are made of knotted muscles that appear chiseled from stone.

Slate grey eyes bulge from their angular heads. They rarely have hair on their heads or bodies. Those pech that do grow hair sprout thick strands as sharp and rigid as a metal brush.

A pech's fingers and toes are long and thin, topped with long, sharp nails as hard as stone. These nails allow them to climb sheer rock walls, acting as pitons that a climber might use.

One with the Stone. Pech are born to work stone, live their lives with a pickaxe in one hand and a hammer in the other, and die with the understanding that their spirits will merge with the stone for eternity, forever surrounding their progeny.

Pech society is built around the notion that pure enlightenment can be attained by communing with the stone that surrounds them. The more one works the stone, the closer one gets to becoming one with it: eternal, immovable, and ever-present.

Pech mine the valuable substances provided by the stone and train their minds to harmonize with the rock until they master certain techniques and become stonemasters. Stonemasters often lead a clan of pech. Truly talented and dedicated stonemasters that reach a higher level of enlightenment with the stone might become lithlords, who travel from clan to clan and teach the young pech the way of the stone.

Servants of the Giants. The pech sometimes come to the surface world to act as servants of the stone giants. Pech are sometimes tasked to bring enormous stone monoliths to the heathers and moors of otherwise stone-free land, which the stone giants can then use as places for their strange mystical ceremonies. Years later, humans walking through the flat fields can only wonder how these huge stone monoliths seemingly appeared out of nowhere.

PECH

Small elemental, neutral good

Armor Class 16 (natural armor)

Hit Points 33 (6d6 + 12)

Speed 20 ft., climb 10 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	11 (+0)	14 (+2)	11 (+0)	13 (+1)	11 (+0)

Skills Athletics +5, Perception +3

Condition Immunities petrified

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 13

Languages Common, Terran, Undercommon

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Light Sensitivity. While in bright light, the pech has disadvantage on attack rolls, as well as on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

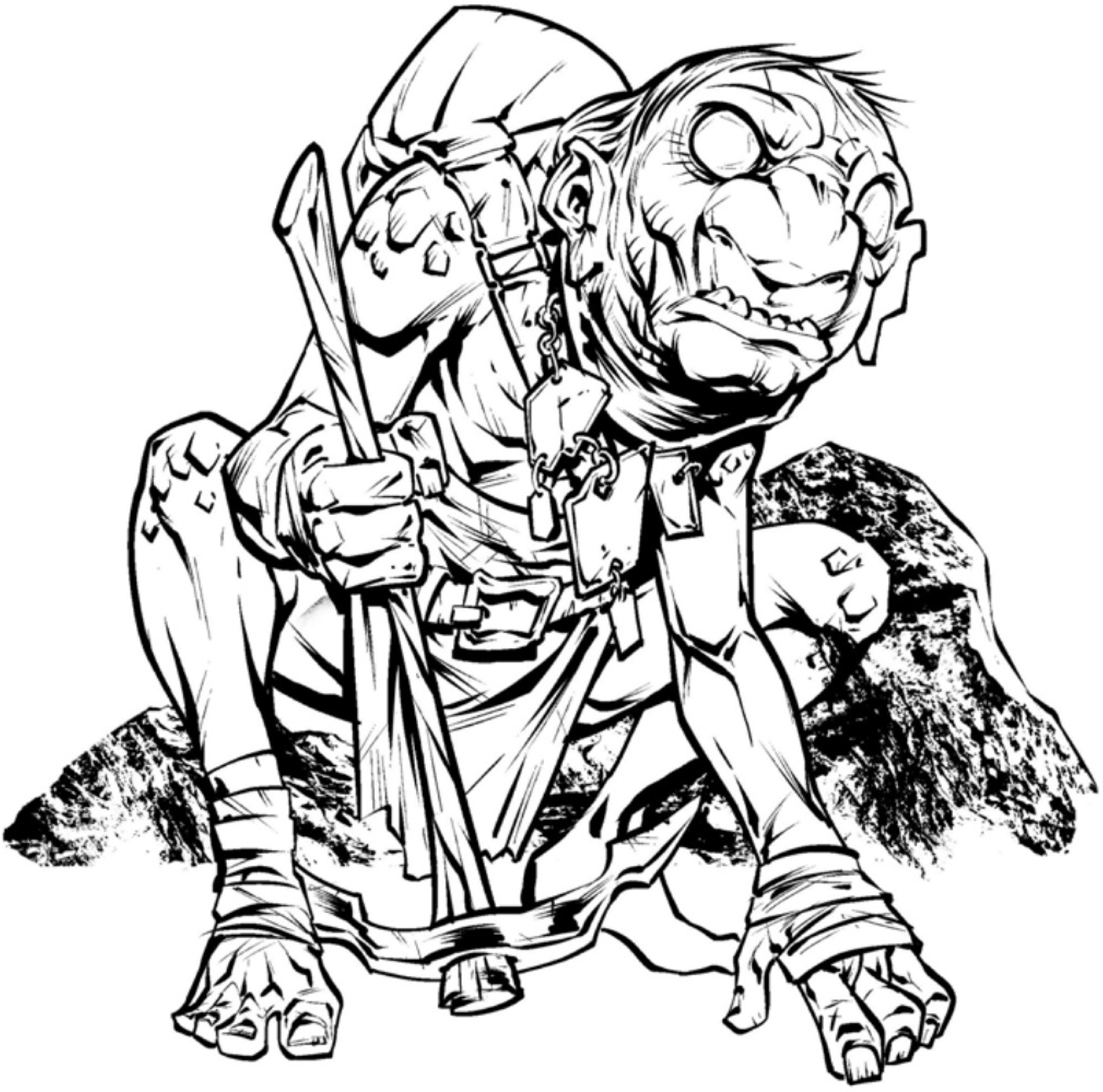
One with the Stone. As a bonus action, the pech can draw on the power of unworked stone, as long as it is in contact with the stone. Until the end of the pech's next turn, it gains resistance to piercing and slashing damage. This power recharges after the pech completes a short or long rest.

Actions

Multiattack. The pech makes one melee attack with the pick and one melee or ranged attack with the hammer. If the pech hits the same target with both attacks, the target must succeed on a DC 11 Constitution saving throw or be incapacitated until the start of its next turn.

Pick. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 +3) piercing damage.

Hammer. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack*: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 +3) bludgeoning damage.



PECH STONEMASTER

Small elemental, neutral good

Armor Class 17 (natural armor)

Hit Points 65 (10d6 + 30)

Speed 20 ft., climb 10 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	11 (+0)	16 (+3)	11 (+0)	16 (+3)	11 (+0)

Skills Athletics +6, Perception +5

Condition Immunities petrified

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 15

Languages Common, Terran, Undercommon

Challenge 4 (1100 XP)

Light Sensitivity. While in bright light, the pech stonemaster has disadvantage on attack rolls, as well as on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

One with the Stone. As a bonus action, the pech can draw on the power of unworked stone, as long as it is in contact with the stone. Until the end of the pech stonemaster's next turn, it gains resistance to all damage. This power recharges after the pech stonemaster completes a short or long rest.

Innate Spellcasting. The pech stonemaster's innate spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 13). The pech stonemaster can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *thunderwave*

3/day: *shatter*

Actions

Multiattack. The pech stonemaster makes one melee attack with the pick and one melee or ranged attack with the hammer. If the pech stonemaster hits the same target with both attacks, the target must succeed on a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or be stunned until the start of its next turn.

Pick. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 +4) piercing damage.

Hammer. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack*: +6 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 +4) bludgeoning damage.

PECH LITHLORD

Small elemental, neutral good

Armor Class 18 (natural armor)

Hit Points 104 (16d6 + 48)

Speed 30 ft., climb 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	11 (+0)	16 (+3)	11 (+0)	18 (+4)	13 (+1)

Skills Athletics +7, Perception +7

Condition Immunities petrified

Senses darkvision 120 ft., passive Perception 17

Languages Common, Terran, Undercommon

Challenge 7 (2900 XP)

Light Sensitivity. While in bright light, the pech lithlord has disadvantage on attack rolls, as well as on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

One with the Stone. As a bonus action, the pech lithlord can draw on the power of unworked stone, as long as it is in contact with the stone. Until the end of the pech lithlord's next turn, it gains immunity to all damage. This power recharges after the pech lithlord completes a short or long rest.

Innate Spellcasting. The pech lithlord's innate spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 15). The pech lithlord can innately cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *mending, thunderwave* (cast as a 3rd-level slot)

3/day: *shatter* (cast as a 3rd-level slot)

1/day: *meld into stone, stone shape*

Actions

Multiattack. The pech lithlord makes one melee attack with the pick and one melee or ranged attack with the hammer. If the pech lithlord hits the same target with both attacks, the target must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or be stunned for one minute. The target can attempt a DC 15 Constitution saving throw at the end of each turn to remove the stunned condition.

Pick. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 +3) piercing damage.

Hammer. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack*: +5 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 +3) bludgeoning damage.

Communal Spellcasting

Given the pechs' affinity for and reliance on stone, as well as the magic they use to work with it, groups of pech can come together to perform greater feats of magic as a group. Even the lowliest pech miners, when in a large enough group, can bend the stone to their will.

Below is a list of powers that can be harness by a group of pech. All of the spells, powers, or abilities below use a 13 DC for spell saves and a +5 to any attack rolls.

4 pech: Four pech can each use an action in the same round to cast *thunderwave*. The damage on this spell is maximized. These pech cannot take part in any communal spellcasting until they finish a long rest.

6 pech: Six pech can each use an action in the same round to cast *shatter*. The damage on this spell is maximized. These pech cannot take part in any communal spellcasting until they finish a long rest.

8 pech: Eight pech can each use an action in the same round to cast *sanctuary* on themselves. In addition to the other effects of the spell, any creature failing a saving throw against the spell takes 5 (1d10) force damage. These pech cannot take part in any communal spellcasting until they finish a long rest.

10 pech: Ten pech (including at least one pech stonemaster) can each use an action in the same round to cast *conjure minor elementals*. If even one of the pech maintains concentration, the spell remains in effect. Any pech who is no longer concentrating can take part in another communal spellcasting.

12 pech: Twelve pech (including at least one pech stonemaster) can each use an action in the same round to cast *stone shape*. These pech cannot take part in any communal spellcasting until they finish a long rest.

15 pech: Fifteen pech (including at least one pech stonemaster) can each use an action in the same round to cast *conjure elemental*. If even one of the pech maintains concentration, the spell remains in effect. Any pech who is no longer concentrating can take part in another communal spellcasting.

20 pech: Twenty pech (including at least one pech stonemaster) can each use an action in the same round to cast *move earth*. This casting can effect stone as well as the other materials. If even one of the pech maintains concentration, the spell remains in effect. Any pech who is no longer concentrating can take part in another communal spellcasting.

30 pech: Thirty pech (including at least one pech lithlord) can each use an action in the same round to cast *earthquake*. If even one of the pech maintains concentration, the spell remains in effect. Any pech who is no longer concentrating can take part in another communal spellcasting.

The Great Stone. Any community of pech that has a stonemaster overseeing it also has a powerful magic item at its center, referred to as the Great Stone. This stone can be made of anything from precious gemstone to simple granite. This stone is revered by the community, and in return, it offers its power and protection to the pech.

The Great Stone conveys the following benefits to the pech:

- Any pech adjacent to the Great Stone of its community has advantage on all saving throws.
- Any pech adjacent to the Great Stone of its community scores a critical hit on a weapon attack roll of 18–20.
- The one with the stone ability of pech becomes a Recharge 6 power when they start their turn adjacent to the Great Stone of their community.

NECROTIC TICK

by Richard Green

A tick, bloated to the size of a child's head, buries its head deep in the armpit of its victim. Circles of necrotic flesh bubble around the bite wound.

Necrotic ticks are normal ticks that have gorged themselves on blood rich with negative energy. They grow unnaturally large as they feed, weighing in excess of 4 pounds when fully engorged. Most begin their voracious lives attached to the backs of animal zombies, and it is not uncommon to find a cluster of them on a single animal.

When the blood of a necrotic tick's undead host runs dry, the parasite rides its victim to a new host—usually an unfortunate living creature. As it sucks the living creature's blood, it leaks negative energy into the bite wound and starts a process that slowly turns the hapless victim into a zombie one pound of flesh at a time. If no potential hosts are available, ridden hosts hide in dark crevices or in trees, where they wait to pounce on the next passerby and deliver their crawling passengers.

The disgusting Lord Rodyan of Hengksburg in the Blood Kingdom breeds necrotic ticks in the laboratory beneath his mansion. He is using the foul creatures to create zombies to fight for him in the city's gladiatorial arena.

NECROTIC TICK

Tiny beast, unaligned

Armor Class 15 (natural armor)

Hit Points 3 (1d4 + 1)

Speed 5 ft., climb 5 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
2 (−4)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	1 (−5)	12 (+1)	8 (−1)

Saving Throws Con +3

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 11

Languages —

Challenge 1/4 (50 XP)

Necrotic Regeneration. While attached to a living host, a necrotic tick leaks negative energy into the host's bloodstream, so its wounds quickly heal over with scabrous, necrotic flesh. If the host does not already have regeneration, it regains 2 hit points at the start of its turn if it has at least 1 hit point.

Track how many "necrotic hit points" a host recovers via necrotic regeneration. Magical healing reverses the necrosis and subtracts an equal number of necrotic hit points from those accumulated. Once the necrotic hit points equal the host's total hit points, the host becomes a zombie.

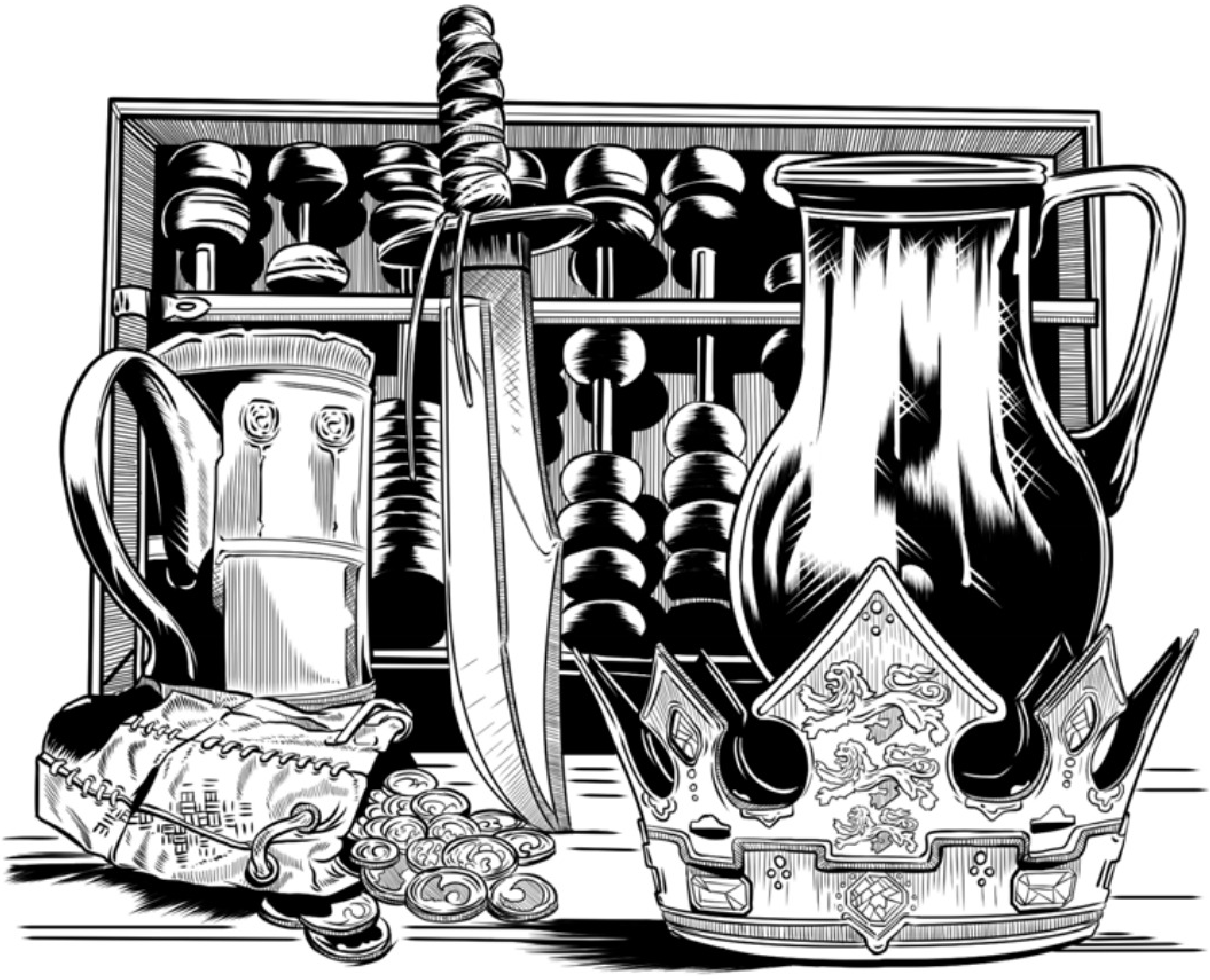
Ride Host. Once a tick's living host has lost three quarters of its maximum hit points from blood drain, the tick's toxins fill the host with an unnatural desire to approach other living beings. When a suitable creature is within 5 feet, the tick incites a sudden rage in the host, who attempts to grapple the nearby creature so the tick can try to attach itself to the new victim.

Actions

Blood Drain. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one creature. *Hit:* 1 piercing damage, and the tick attaches to the target. The target must make a DC 13 Wisdom saving throw. If it fails, it is affected by the tick's toxins and does not attempt to remove it. The host will even replace a dislodged tick unless prevented from doing so for a full minute, after which the tick's influence fades.

At the start of each of the tick's turns, the target loses 5 (1d4 + 3) hit points due to blood loss.

The tick can detach itself by spending its movement. It does so when seeking a new host or if the target dies. A creature, including the target, can use its action to detach the tick. When a necrotic tick detaches, voluntarily or otherwise, its host takes 1 hit point damage



NPCs

THE FANGED FOUR

by James J. Haeck

The underworld of the Crossroads trembles at the mention of the Fanged Four. For the right price, Embline the Wolf can slay anyone, Rizto the Rat can fool anyone, Valtane the Boar can hunt down any mark, and Lashkan the Tiger can disintegrate anyone with a single word. These four lycanthropes—a werewolf, wererat, wereboar, and weretiger—have recently gathered in the Crossroads, creating one of the deadliest band of mercenaries ever known. They follow no law but their own and will do nearly anything for enough gold, making them enemies of both the lawful and unlawful factions of the Crossroads.

Embline the Wolf

"You've erred gravely, brave pup, and though your foolhardy boldness earns you my sympathy... it does not win you my mercy. I do not need the light of the full moon to slay you. The wolf within me is not my enemy but my faithful servant, and my transformation will only take an instant. Feel free to flee; you will not get far."

Embline is a human werewolf born in a tiny village in the Northlands. No record of her village remains, for she slaughtered every last man, woman, and child on a full moon just after her nineteenth birthday. After she returned to her senses, she recalled the wolf that bit her on a hunting trip two weeks earlier and cried out in sorrow. The pain of mercilessly killing everyone she had ever known broke her.

As the feral young woman wandered the wilderness of Midgard, Embline came to learn that the only trade she found pleasure in was murder. Over the next few years, Embline sought out other lycanthropes like herself and cultivated the legend of the Fanged Four: four natural-born lycanthrope assassins who would hunt down anyone for the right price. For a time, Embline herself was the only member of the Fanged Four and personally killed all manner of politicians, soldiers, spies, and merchants. No one ever realized her deception, and in time, the reputation of her so-called league of assassins spread across Midgard, and other lycanthropes flocked to her, seeking to become one of the Fangs.

Embline's once-noble human persona has been completely subsumed by her cruel and megalomaniacal wolfish identity. She now relishes taunting her prey, monologuing at length about how she intends to kill them. Ten years have passed since Embline founded the Fanged Four. Now she and her three fellow assassins live in an impressive mansion in Zobeck known as Brier House, so called for the thick but well-cultivated brier hedges that surround its grounds. As leader of the Fanged Four, Embline is the only member that can accept a contract on their behalf.

A powerful warrior in her own right, Embline's lycanthropic powers only enhance her impressive martial prowess. Embline has one deep weakness that she fears above all else: she is not a natural-born lycanthrope, meaning that a well-placed *remove curse* spell could cleanse her lycanthropy in the middle of a battle. Worse still, she fears that her animal instincts are the only thing keeping her from going mad from all the blood she has spilled and that being cleansed could destroy her utterly. Not even the other members of the Fanged Four know that their leader is not a natural-born werewolf, though Rizto the Rat is close to uncovering the truth.

EMBLINE THE WOLF

Medium humanoid (human, shapechanger), chaotic evil

Armor Class 15 in human form, 16 (natural armor) in wolf or hybrid form

Hit Points 105 (14d8 + 42)

Speed 30 ft. (50 ft. in wolf form)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	21 (+5)	16 (+3)	15 (+2)	18 (+4)	15 (+3)

Saving Throws Dex +8, Int +5, Wis +7

Skills Acrobatics +8, Perception +7, Stealth +8

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Damage Immunities bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from attacks not made with silvered weapons

Senses passive Perception 17

Languages Common (can't speak in wolf form)

Challenge 8 (3,900 XP)

Opportunistic Shapechanger. Embline can use her action to polymorph into a wolf-humanoid hybrid or into a wolf or back into her true form, which is human. Her statistics, other than her AC, are the same in each form. Any equipment she is wearing or carrying isn't transformed. She reverts to her true form if she dies.

While in wolf or hybrid form, Embline has advantage on attack rolls against a creature if at least one of her allies is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

Keen Hearing and Smell. Embline has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on hearing or smell.

Vicious Mauler (1/Turn). Embline deals an extra 17 (5d6) damage when she hits a target with a melee attack and has advantage on the attack roll.

Actions

Multiattack. Embline makes two bite attacks and two claw attacks, or she makes two light crossbow attacks.

Bite (Wolf or Hybrid Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack*: +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d8 + 5) piercing damage. If the target is a humanoid, it must succeed on a DC 16 Constitution saving throw or be cursed with werewolf lycanthropy.

Claws (Wolf or Hybrid Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack*: +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (2d4 + 5) slashing damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 16 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Light Crossbow (Humanoid or Hybrid Form Only). *Ranged Weapon Attack*: +8 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (1d8 + 6) piercing damage.

Rizto the Rat

"Don't doubt my snout, boss. I smelled our mark on the breeze three days ago. I could track him with my eyes closed."

Rizto has lived in the sewers of Zobeck his entire life, committing petty crimes and cavorting with the ratfolk that live below the Crossroads City. Before joining the Fanged Four, Rizto spent almost every waking hour in his hybrid wererat form to blend in with the ratfolk in the sewers. He earned a reputation for himself as a burglar and spy-for-hire in the sewers and earned a sizeable personal fortune playing both sides of the fence, smuggling information between rival ratfolk gangs.

Rizto was the second lycanthrope to join the Fanged Four and is Embline's second-in-command. Drawn to the streets of Zobeck by legends of the Fanged Four, he used his prodigious skills as an information-seeker to track rumors back to Brier House—where he was caught snooping by Embline herself. Rather than killing him where he stood, Embline was impressed by his skills and offered him the chance to join her growing company of bounty hunters.

RIZTO THE RAT

Medium humanoid (human, shapechanger), lawful evil

Armor Class 14

Hit Points 78 (12d8 + 24)

Speed 30 ft. (40 ft. in rat form)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	18 (+4)	14 (+2)	17 (+3)	15 (+2)	21 (+5)

Saving Throws Dex +7, Wis +5, Cha +8

Skills Deception +11, Insight +8, Perception +8, Persuasion +8, Stealth +10

Damage Resistances poison; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Damage Immunities bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from attacks not made with silvered weapons

Condition Immunities poisoned

Senses darkvision 60 ft. (rat form only), passive Perception 18

Languages Common, Ratfolk (can't speak Common in rat form)

Challenge 7 (2,900 XP)

Deceitful Shapechanger. Rizto can use his action to polymorph into a rat-humanoid hybrid or into a giant rat or back into his true form, which is human. His statistics, other than his size, are the same in each form. Any equipment he is wearing or carrying isn't transformed. He reverts to his true form if he dies.

Once per turn while in hybrid form, Rizto can make a Charisma (Deception) check and use its result instead of making an attack roll when making a melee attack against a creature that can see him.

Evasion. If Rizto is subjected to an effect that allows him to make a Dexterity saving throw to take only half damage, he instead takes no damage if he succeeds on the saving throw and only half damage if he fails.

Keen Smell. Rizto has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on smell.

Sewerborn. Rizto has advantage on saving throws against poison and disease.

Sneak Attack (1/Turn). Rizto deals an extra 14 (4d6) damage either when he hits a target with a weapon and has advantage on the attack roll or when the target is within 5 feet of an ally of his that isn't incapacitated and he doesn't have disadvantage on the attack roll.

Actions

Multiattack (Humanoid or Hybrid Form Only). Rizto makes three attacks, only one of which can be a bite.

Bite (Rat or Hybrid Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack*: +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (2d4 + 4) piercing damage plus 11 (2d10) poison damage. If the target is a humanoid, it must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or be cursed with wererat lycanthropy.

Shortsword (Humanoid or Hybrid Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack*: +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage plus 11 (2d10) poison damage.

Hand Crossbow (Humanoid or Hybrid Form Only). *Ranged Weapon Attack*: +7 to hit, range 30/120 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage plus 11 (2d10) poison damage.

Reactions

Uncanny Dodge. When an attacker Rizto can see hits him with an attack, he can choose to take half damage.

Valtane the Boar

"You don't touch Embline. You so much as touch her, you lose that hand. You look at her wrong, you lose the eyes. You speak bad of her, and I'll carve out your forked tongue."

Valtane is a natural-born lycanthrope, but she prefers to live life in her dwarf body. Her face may be wrinkled, but she is one of the Fanged Four's newest members, having joined only two years ago. Before then, she was a dirt-poor fur trader that trapped animals in the Old Margreve Forest and sold pelts in cities across Midgard. She crossed paths with Embline and Rizto as they pursued a former member of the Fanged Four down the length of the River Argent. (Valtane hadn't known a member of the Fanged Four betrayed her, and Embline has never told her.)

Valtane got caught up in the skirmish and watched as the rogue werewolf plunged a silver dagger into Embline's side. Without thinking, the Valtane leapt to Embline's side, drew the dagger, and plunged it straight between the traitor's eyes. Even she couldn't tell you why she aided Embline on that day, but she suspects that she was destined to protect her.

Embline survived, and Valtane's heroism earned her not just Embline's respect but an offer to join the Fanged Four in the place of the betrayer she had killed. Valtane agreed on the spot. She is fiercely loyal to Embline, and while she is greedy and overconfident, she treats her fellow Fangs like family.

VALTANE THE BOAR

Medium humanoid (dwarf, shapechanger), chaotic neutral

Armor Class 14 (hide, shield) in humanoid form, 18 (natural armor) in boar or hybrid form

Hit Points 136 (16d8 + 64)

Speed 30 ft. (40 ft. in boar form)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
21 (+5)	10 (+0)	18 (+4)	10 (+0)	17 (+3)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Str +9, Dex +4, Con +8

Skills Athletics +9, Perception +7, Intimidation +7

Damage Resistances poison; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Damage Immunities bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from attacks not made with silvered weapons

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 17

Languages Common, Dwarven (can't speak in boar form)

Challenge 9 (5,000 XP)

Resilient Shapechanger. Valtane can use her action to polymorph into a boar-humanoid hybrid or into a boar or back into her true form as a dwarf. Her statistics, other than her AC, are the same in each form. Any equipment she is wearing or carrying isn't transformed. She reverts to her true form if she dies.

Valtane has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects while in hybrid or in boar form.

Charge (Boar or Hybrid Form Only). If Valtane moves at least 15 feet straight toward a target and then hits it with her tusks on the same turn, the target takes an extra 14 (4d6) slashing damage. If the target is a creature, it must succeed on a DC 16 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone.

Dwarven Resilience. Valtane has advantage on saving throws against poison.

Goading Defender (1/Turn). When Valtane hits with a melee attack, she can make a Charisma (Intimidation) check opposed by her target's Wisdom (Insight) check. If she succeeds, the target has disadvantage on attack rolls against creatures other than Valtane until the end of its next turn.

Relentless (Recharges after a Short or Long Rest). If Valtane takes damage that would reduce her to 0 hit points, she is reduced to 1 hit point instead. This trait also recharges immediately if a friendly creature Valtane can see is reduced to 0 hit points.

Actions

Multiattack. Valtane makes three attacks, only one of which can be with her tusks.

Warhammer (Humanoid or Hybrid Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack*: +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d8 + 5) bludgeoning damage.

Tusks (Boar or Hybrid Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack*: +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 19 (4d6 + 5) slashing damage. If the target is humanoid, it must succeed on a DC 16 Constitution saving throw or be cursed with wereboar lycanthropy.

Reactions

Selfless Defense. When a friendly creature is attacked by a creature Valtane can see, she can move up to her speed toward the friendly creature. If she ends her movement adjacent to the friendly creature, she can choose to become the new target of the attack. If the attack hits her, she can make a melee attack against the attacker as part of this reaction.

Lashkan the Tiger

"I have traveled on ships swarming with rats and biting fleas. I have been chained in bonds of silver, each second searing my flesh. When I reached Triolo, I knew I had to change my fate. I escaped my bonds and tracked down the man who had thought himself powerful enough to purchase me and display me as an oddity of the savage south. I came to Zobeck and tore his throat out, and I burned his mansion down with a thought."

Lashkan is a human weretiger captured as a child by slavers decades ago near the Southlands' Corsair Coast. He managed to escape bondage in the Seven Cities and swore vengeance on the slavers' master, a depraved collector of curiosities in Zobeck. After traveling thousands of miles for vengeance, Lashkan found himself adrift after finally slaying the man who had destroyed his life.

He was found by Rizto several weeks later. The fire that Lashkan had set after killing the collector may have burned down the mansion, but it did not completely purge the weretiger's scent from the wreckage—at least, not to a nose as keen as Rizto's. Embline was wary of the weretiger's unpredictable temper but longed to add his magic to her arsenal.

Lashkan is the least loyal of the Fanged Four, and Embline knows it. The weretiger is content to serve the Fanged Four for the time being, but he is wary of anyone who would hold power over him. He seeks constantly to undermine his leader and supplant her as master of the Fanged Four.

LASHKAN THE TIGER

Medium humanoid (human, shapechanger), chaotic evil

Armor Class 12 in human form, 14 (natural armor) in tiger or hybrid form

Hit Points 120 (16d8 + 48)

Speed 30 ft. (40 ft. in tiger form)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
17 (+3)	15 (+2)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)	13 (+1)	21 (+5)

Saving Throws Dex +6, Int +4, Wis +5

Skills Perception +5, Stealth +6

Damage Resistances poison; bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Damage Immunities bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from attacks not made with silvered weapons

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 15

Languages Common

Challenge 9 (5,000 XP)

Arcane Shapechanger. Lashkan can use his action to polymorph into a tiger-humanoid hybrid or into a tiger or back into his true form, which is human. His statistics, other than his size, are the same in each form. Any equipment he is wearing or carrying isn't transformed. He reverts to his true form if he dies.

Lashkan can cast spells while in tiger form, requiring no somatic components. His claws count as an arcane focus.

Keen Hearing and Smell. Lashkan has advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on hearing or smell.

Pounce (Tiger or Hybrid Form Only). If Lashkan moves at least 15 feet straight toward a creature and then hits it with a claw attack on the same turn, that target must succeed on a DC 14 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone. If the target is prone, Lashkan can make one bite attack against it as a bonus action.

Spellcasting. Lashkan is an 11th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Charisma (spell save DC 17, +9 to hit with spell attacks). He has the following sorcerer spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *dancing lights, fire bolt, message, poison spray, shocking grasp, true strike*

1st level (4 slots): *magic missile, feather fall*

2nd level (3 slots): *knock, mirror image*

3rd level (3 slots): *fireball, fly, water breathing*

4th level (3 slots): *banishment, dimension door*

5th level (2 slots): *dominate person, insect plague*

6th level (1 slot): *disintegrate*

ACTIONS

Multiattack (Humanoid or Hybrid Form Only). In humanoid form, Lashkan makes two scimitar attacks. In hybrid form, he can make two scimitar or claw attacks.

Bite (Tiger or Hybrid Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack*: +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d10 + 3) piercing damage. If the target is a humanoid, it must succeed on a DC 17 Constitution saving throw or be cursed with weretiger lycanthropy.

Claw (Tiger or Hybrid Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack*: +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) slashing damage.

Scimitar (Humanoid or Hybrid Form Only). *Melee Weapon Attack*: +7 to hit, reach # ft., one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6 + 3) slashing damage.

THE SILENT COUNCIL

by Shawn Merwin

One of the most enduring elements of fantasy cities is the guild. Guilds present player characters with allies who can pay for services rendered, potential foes looking to wield economic or political power, or just good fodder for intriguing and rich stories. And among all of the guilds one might imagine, none has more potential than your friendly neighborhood thieves' guild.

Thieves' guilds may not seem to make sense at first glance. Why would a city suffer the existence of a group inherently conceived to perform illegal activities? The answer is simple: crime is bad but uncontrolled crime is worse. A guild of thieves ensures that the crime is organized and controlled, and if a reckoning is necessary, a hierarchy is in place to carry out any needed punishment.

More than one thieves' guild might come to power at the same time. Wars between hostile trade guilds could turn bloody and devastating if enough wealth and power is at stake. Strife between thieves' guilds is triply deadly.

When war between two or more rival thieves' guilds spills into the lives of a city's innocent citizens, the civil leaders are often forced to intervene. Putting down the offending guilds with physical force is an option although it rarely ends well for anyone involved. A more reasonable solution is to create a council with the power and authority to regulate and arbitrate the activities of all guilds.

No matter the details of your city, the Silent Council (presented here) is a useful tool. The Silent Council is a secret organization that handles the interactions between a city's various thieves' guilds, making sure that none oversteps its bounds, keeping the level of crime in the city acceptable.

The Silent Council's Organization

The Silent Council operates independently of the various thieves' guilds. It is overseen by a commander who answers only to the governing bodies within the city. Beneath her are two lieutenants, each handling approximately five units of specially trained investigators that spy on the guilds, intervene when necessary, and even perform assassinations on guild members that cross the line.

The individual units contain 4–6 operatives, each led by a captain who reports to the lieutenants. Captains attain their rank after serving successfully as an operative for at least 4 years, having not only survived the rigors of the job but also proven themselves immune to the bribery and other temptations that come with it.

Operatives are often recruited from the ranks of the City Watch. Watch members who show inherent honesty, an affinity for stealth and persuasion, and a knack for getting out of tight spots through guile might be groomed to become operatives in the Silent Council's employ. Operatives from a unit, or sometimes full units, are often called upon to go undercover to catch guild members breaking the unwritten rules overseeing thieves' guild operations and interactions.

An antagonistic relationship exists, surprisingly, between other law enforcement agencies and the Silent Council. The Silent Council is not concerned with stopping crime, except in the most extreme cases: treason, murder of a noble, and so on. The thieves' guilds bristle at the existence of the Silent Council, but they are willing to accept the oversight—with the understanding that the Silent Council does not police the "sanctioned criminal activity" of the guilds. And so, Silent Council operatives might have evidence of crimes they witness, but they do not share that evidence with the City Watch, which leads to conflicts.

The heads of each of the thieves' guilds meet at regular intervals with the commander of the Silent Council, though her identity is guarded through magic (see below). In addition to these scheduled meetings, a guild leader with a grievance or concern can also call a special meeting with the commander.

Members of the Silent Council

The head of the Silent Council, appointed and paid by the leaders of the city, is a elfmarked called Stiletto. She has proven to be wise, just, incorruptible, and totally ruthless in carrying out her duties. One of the things that has made Stiletto so effective in her job is the fact that she's a doppelganger. No one is aware of this except for the city leaders—even her lieutenants are unaware. This helps her keep tabs on not only the guilds but also on her operatives. More than once, a guild has infiltrated a Silent Council team only to be ferreted out quickly and quietly by Stiletto—and the leader of that guild paid the ultimate price for the treachery.

Stiletto's first lieutenant is a forest gnome who calls himself Brill. He appears mad to those observing him, talking to himself and to unseen creatures. His unruly white hair and disheveled appearance are carefully crafted to reinforce this image. In reality, Brill is a practiced illusionist and strategist who commands the fierce loyalty of those he supervises. He is guarded by three trained wild boars that are under the effects of a perpetual *greater invisibility* spell.

The second lieutenant holding Stiletto's trust is the hill dwarf Connica Ironshard. Originally an adept in the service of the deity of locks and spies, Connica's ingenuity brought her to Stiletto's attention. While Connica has none of the stealth of a rogue, her understanding of engineering, both mechanical and social, makes her invaluable to the Silent Council. Connica keeps her long red hair under a thick leather cap, and her perpetual scowl is indicative of her obsession with her job.

The Silent Council in your Game

The Silent Council can be ported into your ongoing campaign in a variety of ways:

- The adventurers should generally be on the same side of the battle as the members of the Silent Council since they are a force of law and order in the city. Operatives of the group might show up and assist or save the adventurers when a member of one of the thieves' guilds attacks them.
- While the Silent Council might be the "good guys," they are still an espionage organization. Such organizations are generally not above using deception to obtain and work assets toward their cause, even putting those assets in harm's way. The adventurers might be recruited to perform surveillance on behalf of the Silent Council while not really

understanding the true nature of their work. The danger caused by the mission could come back to haunt them later—whether or not the Silent Council responds to that danger is always a question.

- Thieves' guild leaders could try to trick adventurers into attacking Silent Council operatives or even leaders. The guild leaders would provide misleading information, saying that the operatives were a threat. If the adventurers fell for that misinformation, they might quickly find themselves at war with a very irate and vengeful Silent Council. Stiletto would, most likely, investigate the situation herself before doing permanent damage to the adventurers.
- If any adventurers are stepping on the toes of a thieves' guild, the Silent Council might warn them off, describing the tense relationship among the guilds in the city.

STILETTO (DOPPELGANGER)

Medium monstrosity (shapechanger), neutral good

Armor Class 18 (studded leather, shield)

Hit Points 104 (16d8 + 32)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	18 (+4)	14 (+2)	13 (+1)	15 (+2)	18 (+4)

Skills Deception +12, Insight +6, Perception +6, Persuasion +8, Sleight of Hand +8, Stealth +8

Condition Immunities charmed

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 16

Languages Common, Dwarvish, Elvish, Gnomish, Halfling

Challenge 9 (5,000 XP)

Cunning. As a bonus action, Stiletto can Dash, Disengage, or Hide on each of her turns in combat.

Shapechanger. Stiletto can use a bonus action to polymorph into a Small or Medium humanoid she has seen or back into her true form. Her statistics, other than size, are the same in each form. Any equipment she is wearing or carrying isn't transformed. She reverts to her true form if she dies. Stiletto does not register as a shapechanger under the scrutiny of magic that would normally detect that.

Sneak Attack (1/Turn). Stiletto deals an extra 21 (6d6) damage either when she hits a target with a weapon attack and has advantage on the attack roll or when the target is within 5 feet of an ally of Stiletto that isn't incapacitated and Stiletto doesn't have disadvantage on the attack roll.

Surprise Attack. Stiletto has advantage on attack rolls against any creature she has surprised. If Stiletto surprises a creature and hits it with an attack during the first round of combat, the target takes an extra 14 (4d6) damage from the attack.

Actions

Multiattack. Stiletto makes two melee or ranged attacks.

Short Sword. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +8 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage.

Shortbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack*: +8 to hit, range 80/320 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage.

Read Thoughts. Stiletto magically reads the surface thoughts of one creature within 60 feet of her. The effect can penetrate barriers, but 3 feet of wood or dirt, 2 feet of stone, 2 inches of metal, or a thin sheet of lead blocks it. While the target is in range, Stiletto can continue reading its thoughts as long as Stiletto's concentration isn't broken (as if concentrating on a spell). While reading the target's mind, Stiletto has advantage on Wisdom (Insight) and Charisma (Deception, Intimidation, and Persuasion) checks against the target.

Reactions

Dodge. When an attacker she can see hits Stiletto with an attack, she can use a reaction to halve that attack's damage.

BRILL

Small humanoid (gnome), neutral good

Armor Class 13 (16 with *mage armor*)

Hit Points 66 (12d6 + 24)

Speed 25 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
8 (−1)	16 (+3)	15 (+2)	19 (+4)	12 (+1)	13 (+1)

Skills Arcana +7, History +7, Nature +7

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 11

Languages Common, Dwarvish, Elvish, Gnomish

Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Gnome Cunning. Brill has advantage on all Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma saving throws against magic.

Master of Illusions. When Brill casts an illusion spell of 1st level or higher, he is surrounded by a hazy mist of magical energy until the start of his next turn. While surrounded by the mist, which travels with him, ranged attacks against Brill are made at disadvantage.

Spellcasting. Brill is a 9th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability is Intelligence (spell save DC 15, +7 to hit with spell attacks). Brill has the following wizard spells prepared:

- **Cantrips (at will)**: *fire bolt, mage hand, poison spray, prestidigitation*
- **1st level (4 slots)**: *color spray, disguise self, mage armor, magic missile*
- **2nd level (3 slots)**: *invisibility, mirror image, phantasmal force*

3rd level (3 slots): *counterspell, major image, fly*
4th level (3 slots): *greater invisibility, phantasmal killer*
5th level (1 slot): *mislead*

Actions

Dagger. *Melee or Ranged Weapon Attack*: +6 to hit, reach 5 ft. or range 20/60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d4 + 3) piercing damage.

CONNICA IRONSHARD

Medium humanoid (dwarf), neutral

Armor Class 18 (chain mail, shield)
Hit Points 75 (10d8 + 30)
Speed 25 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	10 (+4)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)	18 (+4)	11 (+2)

Skills Religion +3, Perception +7
Damage Resistances poison
Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 17
Languages Common, Dwarf
Challenge 5 (1,800 XP)

Dwarven Resilience. Connica has advantage on saving throws against poison and resistance against poison damage.

Innate Spellcasting. Connica's innate spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 15, +7 to hit with spell attacks). She can innately cast the following spells as a 7th-level caster, requiring no material components:

At will: *mending, sacred flame*
3/day: *bless, command, find traps, healing word*
2/day: *hold person, protection from energy, spiritual weapon*
1/day: *revivify*

Actions

Multiattack. Connica makes two melee attacks.

Battleaxe. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) slashing damage.

THICK AS THIEVES

by Richard Pett

Rogues—and particularly groups or gangs of them—make great NPCs. Do you trust them or not? Are they heroes or villains? What shades of gray do they encompass? Their very nature lends them to readily allying with one side or another and then casually moving on, drawn by a fabulous hustle or heist to betray the very people that last week they rescued from the town prison, only to use the skills of those they released for their own greedy ends and then betray them.

Here is a trio of tables to help busy GMs define or give a spark to such groups, which might be useful as a focus for an adventure or simply as a story, rumor, or flavor on the side depending upon your needs. The tables set out a gang or guild or mob in simple terms with a quirky or readily memorable leader, together with the predominant members of the gang identified by race or incentive, and finally a motivation for their activities, many of which indicate why they are where they are right now. You can then add any finishing touches you wish. The tables come without any crunch for levels, alignments, or other specifics, so you can tailor them to fit you campaign at a specific time. This particular set of random tables has its soul in the *Midgard Campaign Setting*. However, you can adjust the campaign-specific quirks easily. For example, substitute the minotaur gang leader for a ghoul, drow, or other race more appropriate to your home campaign.

Use a d20 at each of the following stages, and at the end of the tables, we'll suggest a couple of examples to flesh out these groups into something worthy of friends at your table.

Leader

1. A pipe-smoking, female minotaur with a penchant for poetry and known as Harlequin
2. The Round Man, a vast rogue with a reputation for eating his enemies at elaborate banquets
3. A one-eyed elf pirate known as the Monocle, who has a pet sheep called Capstan
4. An elfmarked clockwork-maker called Abrash who uses her machines to aid her burglaries
5. A colorfully dressed kobold called Mister Rainbow who rides a white pig and is a master lock-breaker
6. A wizard known simply as the Collector who goes from place to place stealing obscure arcane texts
7. The outrageously charming merchant Aquim all-Asfar, who wanders the lands procuring the unique and lovely for his client friends

8. The beautiful Esemlie, the tallest lady with the harshest voice and deadliest blade in the kingdom
9. The Sough Man, a revolting and diseased thing some say is an ooze or monster that lurks in the sewers of larger settlements and steals wicked objects or unholy texts
10. A schizophrenic dragonkin called M'kash who distrusts everyone and who is obsessed with disguise
11. Conjoined twins known as the Brothers Kinsman who rule their followers through magic and use magic to aid their thefts
12. The Golden Eagle, a master archer and thief said to be a gargoyle although others swear it is simply a guise he uses while wandering the gables of places he has come to rob
13. A legless dwarf called Mistress Cremp who loves fine art and who is carried by her loyal gearforged companion Lord Ravelment
14. The fearful Gremp who rules with an iron fist and his pair of helpers, Mister Terror and Master Hurt
15. A gnoll slaver known as Tobb who has a talking camel
16. The cultured and magnificent Angelica Hyme, lover of poets, darling of aristocrats, and stealer of fortunes
17. A crooked mite rogue that rides a vulture and who always has a trio of kin with him (their specialty, using rat holes to infiltrate and rob the rich—rat friends are never far away)
18. A wily but quite mad kobold crimelord known as Lord Spider, who plots with his many strange puppets—some of whom have begun to come alive
19. A crooked vampire who obsesses over fine paintings
20. A dispossessed aristocrat known to all as the Gray Fist, renowned for his daring escapades and wooing of local royalty

Motivation

1. Steal religious artefacts, but the gang has been infiltrated by the religious group they are stealing from
2. Revenge—steal the greatest treasures off five sisters of the same noble family living nearby
3. Rob from the rich and give to the poor
4. Carry out elaborate and complex cons on the rich and arrogant, including stealing everything off a vile and local corrupt lord by infiltrating and ultimately removing his entire staff
5. Charged with stealing the wedding cake of some local dignitary about to wed, and return with it intact to a settlement across the hills/forests/mountains
6. Target slavers and their associates, customers, and friends in the settlement as a lesson from a former slave and now gang master
7. Steal from passing adventurers
8. Spread anarchy to bring down the present rulers with a view to removing their guards from keeps onto the streets, thus weakening their defense and ultimately robbing a huge castle
9. Move from one town to the next to ensure they remain anonymous, establish a suitable base, and tyrannize the population for a month or two before moving on
10. Specifically in this location to steal a priceless silver and gold life-size elephant from the local ruler
11. Empty the local prison of villains as cover for removing the notorious Count Grande, an infamous rogue accomplice of theirs due to hang next week
12. Have operated in this settlement for four centuries but recently split into three competing thieves' guilds, all anxious to betray one another to ensure they are the only guild left

13. Here to steal the recipe for the greatest salami sausages in the kingdom from the Royal Sausage Makers Guild headquarters by kidnapping the four cooks who each know a constituent part of the recipe
14. Vengeance upon another group of thieves also operating in this area (perhaps rolling again for the second group) who are pretending to be local priests and stealing gold religious objects
15. Steal a talking holy oracle pig called the Opulent One for a clerical group who believes she is theirs by divine prophecy
16. Rob local merchants
17. In the area to take advantage of the imminent carnival at which hordes of rich wives and widows arrive to show off their jewels and strut about trying to impress their neighbors
18. Here to steal plans for a new clockwork war machine off a cabal of gearforged inventors
19. Attempting to get back a huge tapestry depicting miracles—*The Panoramica Magnificence* (that was stolen from them in the first place and now hangs in the local cathedral)—by emptying the cathedral of its investigative clerical class with a wave of petty thefts from chapels and churches across the settlement first
20. Steal an outstanding local stallion and racehorse called the Shade

Gang

1. A bunch of surly dwarf former miners who were ripped off by their previous boss and intend to dig their way to fortune
2. A group who operate disguised as beggars and tramps to gain confidence and information from the lower classes, spreading hope among them by minor acts of rebellion to disguise their true intentions
3. A group of lay about nobles with nothing better to do
4. An honest and decent group of likeable dwarf rogues with hearts of gold
5. A tough bunch of miners who cover their true colors with religious piety and beautiful hymn singing
6. A group of rogues disguised as nuns
7. Dark-hearted swordsmen who share little love for each other
8. Commoners with extraordinary abilities who lurk in societies' underbelly to carry out thefts of church artefacts and religious objects
9. A group of gnomes disguised as lepers
10. A gang of human and goblin rogues that lurk in the undercity (or undertown)
11. A group of kobolds disguised as children in contemporary festival costumes
12. Multi-raced adventuring troupe who see the presence of other adventurers as great scapegoats for their own crimes
13. A group of nasty former mercenaries who stoop to any lengths to achieve their aims
14. A trio of kobold dandies infamous for wenching and games that risk death
15. A troupe of gnome acrobats and circus performers that have the help of several *awakened* monkey rogues accomplices
16. A clan of extremely agile mites
17. A group of arrogant dragonkin aristocrats who use their charm and intelligence to dupe humans out of their fortunes
18. A pack of *awakened* rats
19. A group of kobold street urchins able to climb and balance on practically anything
20. A bunch of minotaur laborers of incredible strength but little subtlety

This basic trio of points works as a starting place for your group, but they need tweaking into a coherent story. Are they potential villains or friends? Perhaps they're little more than a red herring or a group the PCs interact with as part of a wider adventure. Decide their role accordingly, and then move on to building up their tale.

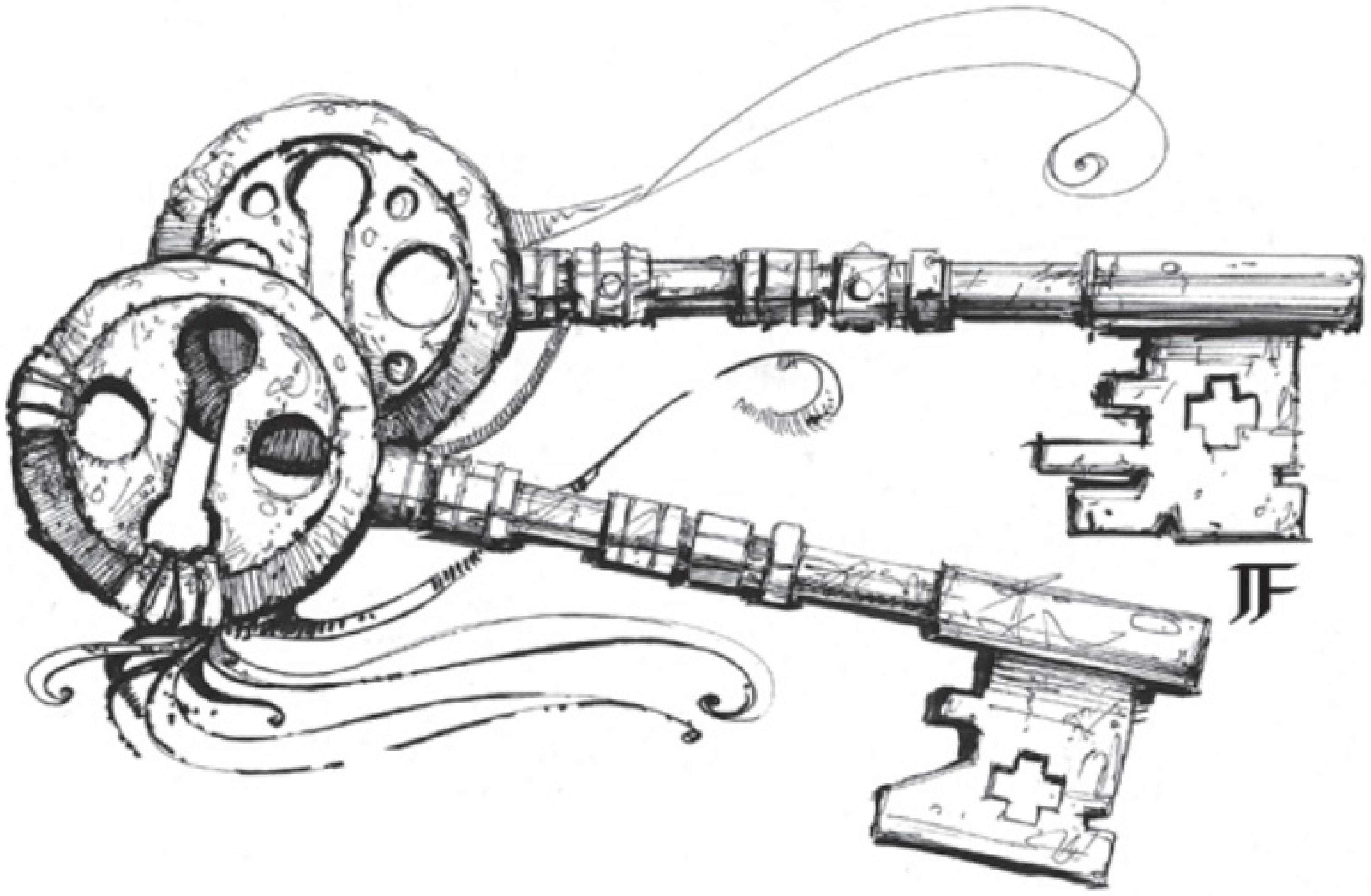
Let's generate an example, using one good gang and one evil gang. Using the tables above, I've randomly generated leader #6, *The outrageously charming merchant Aquim all-Asfar, who wanders the lands procuring the unique and lovely for his client friends*. The motivation is also #6, *Target slavers and their associates, customers, and friends in the settlement as a lesson from a former slave and now gang master*. I'll pick two options for the gang, so we can move this encounter to friend or foe: they are #13, *a group of nasty former mercenaries who stoop to any lengths to achieve their aims* and #4, *an honest and decent group of likeable dwarf rogues with hearts of gold*.

For the first option as our backstory, perhaps Aquim is in town looking for brutal vengeance on a local slaver known as Lady Quorai who has hired the PCs to protect her, having heard Aquim is working for an old enemy of hers. Quorai's slaving trade could be a secret the PCs may not learn of until further into the adventure if you wish, to give the PCs interesting choices later. This story develops with the PCs working for someone who herself—they may find—has a dark past. As the plot develops, Quorai pushes the PCs to seek out Aquim and his vile mercenaries who by reputation and action are pretty nasty. Here you have an adventure or side trek that effectively has villains at each end with the PCs in the center, free to take what actions they wish.

In the second case, the presence of dwarves with hearts of gold suggests Aquim might be a decent sort—though of course you could decide he's duping the dwarves and have an extra twist. Here, the slaver (again we'll use Lady Quorai) approaches the PCs to protect her from assassins; her trade is again a closely guarded secret. Only through roleplay do the PCs discover their enemies are thoroughly decent, something that may lead to a complete U-turn in the adventure as the PCs join the "assassins" in seeking vengeance. Perhaps here Aquim is seeking to free the daughter of one of his sponsors or has another motive?

As a simple rumor, the presence of the trouble above in your campaign fleshes it out, adding realism to your core adventures.

And finally, does the gang have a name? Names strike fear into the hearts of people; reputations precede those who are part of such groups and are useful publicity. It would be easy to create a further table of memorable names like the Grim Street Colliers or the Crooked Blinders, but the joy of a really good name is making it simple and pertinent.



PLANAR VOYAGERS

by Kelly Pawlik

The head of a fierce basilisk stares off to the horizon, carved upon the front of this wooden seagoing vessel, long and narrow. From serpentine snout to the ship's stern measures 54 feet, making it shorter than many other long ships. Its shallow draft allows it to navigate waters only three feet deep.

Magnificent Muck

Overlapping oak planks, riveted together with iron fastenings, create the hull of the long ship. The decking is comprised of removable planks. An assortment of shields is fastened along the length of the vessel, providing protection from the harsh wind and wild waves as well as physical attacks by individuals looking to lay siege to those onboard.

A green sail with golden depictions of two serpents twined around a lightning bolt is fastened to the large, rectangular-shaped mast. Oar ports with rotating covers allowing them to seal out water line the length of the boat. Each member of the crew possesses a sea chest, which also acts as a rowing bench. The narrow bladed wooden oars are usually stowed, however, as the crew aboard this ship prefer to rely on a more magical means of transport.

Most ships this size would encounter an issue with storing their booty, but a nondescript wooden chest allows the captain to hoard a decent number of treasures and other goods safely without compromising the limited deck space.

Without the use of the *Helm of Loki*, the *Magnificent Muck* requires a crew of 25–35 people to properly operate.

THE PLUNDERER'S SEA CHEST

Wondrous item, rare

This oak chest, measuring 3 feet by 5 feet by 3 feet, is secured with iron bands depicting naval combat and scenes of piracy. The sea chest opens into an extradimensional space that can hold up to 3,500 cubic feet or 15,000 pounds of material. The chest always weighs 200 pounds, regardless of its contents.

Placing an item in the sea chest follows the normal rules for interacting with objects. Retrieving an item from the chest requires you to use an action. When you open the chest to access a specific item, that item is always magically on top.

If the chest is destroyed, its contents are lost

MUCK?

In gambling, "muck" most often refers to the pile of discarded cards into which players may throw their folded hands, but it can also refer to a form of sleight of hand used to win a card game.

forever, though an artifact always turns up again, somewhere. If a *bag of holding*, *portable hole*, or similar object is placed within the sea chest, that item and the contents of the chest are immediately destroyed, and the magic of the chest is disrupted for one day after which the sea chest resumes functioning as normal.

HELM OF LOKI

Wondrous item, legendary (requires attunement)

This unassuming ship's wheel is made of weathered birch with two narrow bands of unidentifiable red stone at each point one of the spokes meets the wheel. The true power of the helm is its ability to, when attached to a boat or similar vehicle, randomly *plane shift* anywhere in the Mortal Realm or across the planes, taking the vessel it is attached to and everything located inside it, willing or not.

When attuned to the helm, you can immediately locate the closest tributary of the Ever River, and while boating on that waterway, you have advantage on Wisdom (Survival) checks to navigate it. When the Helm *plane shifts*, you are alerted four hours prior to its departure and can make a DC 20 Wisdom (Survival) check to guide it to one of two locations of your choice with a 50% chance of arrival at either destination. Regardless of where you are in the planes, you can transport yourself to a space within 5 feet of the helm as an action when it *plane shifts*.

No mortal magic can identify the helm as anything other than a mundane device. When attached to a vessel that does not use a wheel, the helm transforms itself into an unassuming example of that vessel's steering mechanism, though it will always have two bands of red stone wrapped about its narrowest point.

Ship's History

The exact origin of the *Magnificent Muck* is difficult to determine. Before it was won by Captain Ibisrix, it was under the command of Captain Kogen Blackmaw, who took it by force from Captain Tilllera Cloudhaven, a graceful and capable elven woman who led her crew on a great many adventures.

Captain Tillera possessed the ship for many decades and most of the crew currently aboard the ship joined up to serve under her. While Captain Tillera commanded the ship, she made some modifications to it, including the addition of a new helm.

The adventurous elf was as devout a worshipper of Loki as one can be, given the nature of the god himself. One day, when plundering the wreckage of a ship washed ashore, she discovered the helm and, recalling a description she had read long ago, knew it instantly for what it was, despite the lack of magical aura. At the time, the helm looked like a ship's wheel but Tillera took it, despite it appearing to be incompatible with her own vessel, and brought it to the *Magnificent Muck* where it transformed into the rudder it now appears to be.

FORMER CAPTAIN KOGEN BLACKMAW

The former captain of the *Magnificent Muck* is an angry-faced dwarf named Kogen Blackmaw (**thief lord**, see *Creature Codex*, with Darkvision 60 ft., advantage on saving throws against being poisoned, and Intimidation rather than Persuasion). A capable fighter with a mouth full of black teeth, he led his pirate crew on many successful conquests over the years. One day, seemingly out of nowhere, Kogen and his crew spotted the *Magnificent Muck*. They quickly pushed in on the ship, and a fierce battle raged. Kogen thought the fight might be lost, but he persevered and managed to slay the captain herself. The battle raged

only seconds longer; his crew was bolstered and quickly overcame the rival crew.

Kogen soon realized his ship was too damaged to sail, and he did not have enough crew to man a ship. After confiscating their weapons to avoid mutiny, Kogen allowed what remained of Tillera's crew to live. Delighting in the possibilities of the new shallow-bottom vessel, Captain Kogen set off. The crew mourned their fair former captain, but they knew they did not have the ability to rise against the ship's new master.

For some years, the *Magnificent Muck* travelled the waterways of the mortal plane. One or two of Tillera's crew disappeared at various ports, always when Captain Kogen was too drunk to care (but too well defended to mutiny against). Others remained on board, almost as if they were waiting for the tide to turn.

One day, sometime after its last *plane shift*, the *Magnificent Muck* traveled into the plane of Casino. It was the first *plane shift* since Tillera's death, and Kogen, not attuned to the *Helm of Loki*, was surprised. Most of the crew had no idea how it had happened, and those who knew the secret of the *Helm of Loki* feigned ignorance. Despite the confusion, the crew disembarked and spent many months enjoying the pleasures and excitement of this entertaining location.

It was here, amidst the exquisite halls and gardens, Kogen found himself at a Dark Table in a dingy back pantry of a tavern kitchen, playing poker with an incubus. Unlike every other game in Casino, those played at a Dark Table are played in "real" coin, and the games are not monitored. Kogen, a canny card shark with some skill in sleight of hand, was certain of his win, and thus he bet the

Magnificent Muck; in a strange twist of fate, the incubus laid the winning hand. While the others present swore they could not hear it, the dwarf was certain he heard a mischievous chuckle as the final hand was laid.

What remained of Kogen's original crew, with the exception of a single halfling, refused to abandon their captain. The incubus, seemingly eager to leave in a hurry, let them stay in Casino with their outraged leader. Here they have remained for some time, impatiently awaiting a way out of the gambling halls and back to the ship.

CAPTAIN IBISRIX

Some decades ago, an incubus was sent on a task to Casino. Here, he was meant to gather information and report back to his superiors. Somewhere amidst the cheerful noises, the bright lights, and the picturesque landscape, the incubus forgot his task; waging bets, winning hands of cards, and entertaining himself with other visitors proved a much better use of his time than gathering information on one or two sad souls, and nearly a decade went by. By this time, those souls had long since fled Casino, hopeful they had covered their trail and fled from their would-be-pursuers.

Word came Ibisrix was to return to the Abyss with his findings. The incubus panicked. He knew his punishment would be swift and extreme and had hoped his superior's fickle nature meant the assignment, and Ibisrix himself, had been forgotten, in favor of something else. While Ibisrix knew he was safe in Casino itself, he was certain he could not out maneuver those who came to collect him for long. After briefly contemplating challenging an emperor for power, Ibisrix decided to avoid the responsibilities that came with the roll in favor of another risky option.

Ibisrix had some experience with Dark Tables in his time in Casino, always with mixed results; with few options left, he settled into a high stakes card game. Some of his opponents proved to be no challenge at all, and quickly the game was down to himself and a black-toothed dwarf. Certain his opponent was cheating but knowing little could be done, Ibisrix called out to the only god who might help an incubus trying to escape his return to the Abyss through a game of cards: Loki.

By some miracle, Ibisrix won the hand and all the winnings, including the *Magnificent Muck*. Quick as could be, the incubus set off to board the ship and escape Casino. He cared little of the small band of pirates who wished to stay with the former captain; Ibisrix saw the ship as a means of escape, not a long-term commitment. He set off with what crew wished to remain aboard and sailed off down the River Lethe.

The ship's first stop ended up being Corremal, the City of Lanterns, in the Shadow Realm. Here, Ibisrix ran into a demon eager to report his location. With the help of a returning crewmember grateful for rescue, the incubus discovered the secret of the *Magnificent Muck* and once again outmaneuvered those who sought his return to the abyss.

Captain Ibisrix is an **incubus** with the following changes: chaotic neutral alignment, **Hit Points** 82 (15d8 + 15), CR 5 (1,800 XP), and the following feature: **Better Lucky Than Good (Recharge 6)**. Captain Ibisrix can have advantage on any attack roll, saving throw, or skill check.

FIRST MATE LANIA TRADEWINDS

Lania Tradewinds was exceptionally close to Captain Tillera Cloudhaven. A faithful right hand to the beloved captain, Lania wished to be more than friends with her companion, but Tillera preferred to focus on the adventure of the high seas, and the various planes they could visit once the new helm had been fastened to the ship; Lania respected her wishes. And so for decades, the two traveled together, gathering an assorted crew of interesting individuals, seeing amazing sights, and encountering all manner of adventures.

One day, the *Magnificent Muck* came to be on the River Lethe in the Shadow Realm. Here, while overnighting near the river with a ship full of crew and nary an extra inch on board, Lania encountered a family who had come to find themselves stranded in the Shadow Realm. They were terrified and wished to return to the Mortal Realm. Lania insisted on helping them and, after some back and forth with Tillera, secured them passage on the *Magnificent Muck* in her place.

Tillera and the crew came back for Lania as soon as they were able, but she had been forced to move on from the location. As agreed, Lania had headed toward Corremal, a popular trade city and the safest place for mortals in the Shadow Realm; Tillera and the crew braved the dangerous waters of the River Lethe to search the City of Lanterns for the ship's first mate, but the timing was off, and the ship's peculiar nature made it impossible to wait.

Eventually, Lania did make it to Corremal, but her time spent in the Shadow Realm and the encounters she had along the way left her permanently shadow-tainted. For some years, Lania awaited Tillera's return until one fateful day she heard rumor the *Magnificent Muck* had returned. She hurried to the ship, eager to lay her eyes upon her friend, only to discover the ship was now captained by Ibisrix. Saddened, but eager to leave behind the shadows, Lania rejoined the crew and imparted the knowledge of the helm to Ibisrix.

Lania is a shadow of her former self, affected both by her stay in the Shadow Realm and by the loss of her dearest companion. Her former crewmates have been known to tell tales of the energetic and happy woman she was before her stay in the Shadow Realm, and she seems to serve as a warning against departing the crew for nary a member has chosen to leave the *Magnificent Muck* since her return.

She is grateful to Ibisrix for allowing her to return to the *Magnificent Muck* and for bringing it, even unknowingly, to collect her from Corremal. Despite all she lost for her benevolent act, Lania remains a generous individual, giving away much of the treasure she acquires in her travels to those who are down on their luck.

Lania is a **war priest** (see *Creature Codex*) with darkvision 120 feet. Her Imbued Warhammer attack deals thunder damage rather than radiant or necrotic damage. She has the following feature: **Storm Bolt (3/Day)**. Lania can throw her warhammer to a range of 60 feet When she does so, it becomes a line of lightning 5 feet wide, beginning at her and extending straight toward her target. If the target is less than 60 feet away from her, the line of lightning extends beyond it. Each creature in the line takes 19 (2d10 +8) lightning damage or half damage with a successful Dexterity saving throw. Lania has two levels of shadow corruption (see *Midgard Worldbook*), which have not been cured despite her exit from the Shadow Realm.

Ship's Crew

There are currently twenty-five crewmembers aboard the *Magnificent Muck*, including Captain Ibisrix. The crew is an assorted bunch; originally from various cultures, races, and even planes, what the crew of the *Magnificent Muck* has in common is their love of the ship and their desire to explore.

Some of the notable crew include:

Tavika Wolfbane. (Winterfolk halfling **druid**). Originally press-ganged to join Captain Kogen's crew, Tavika found herself aboard the Magnificent Muck after attacking it. She despises Kogen and has come to respect all of the current crew, especially Captain Ibisrix. She is often a bit standoffish to newcomers and always prefers the company of her gull companion. While she is best known for her healing prowess aboard the ship, Tavika is also a capable combatant.

Songbird. This androgynous human is actually a disguised fallen **deva**. As their punishment for slipping into neutrality, Songbird was cast from heaven and told that they could not return to Paradise until they could sing the Celebration of Fourteen Dooms. They seek this lost song still. They have been crew of the Magnificent Muck far longer than anyone else and precede the ship's association with the *Helm of Loki*. Songbird is perpetually silent and has lost their healing touch and ability to cast *raise dead*.

Kror and **Klar Ironwulf** (**wolf reaver dwarf**, see *Tome of Beasts*). These brothers are two of the most recent additions to the Magnificent Muck. Hired on by Ibisrix shortly after his acquisition of the ship, the brothers were found stranded in Beruthea, Kingdom of Cats, after using the House of Infinite Doors to escape a particularly nasty encounter with a band of **magma mephits**. They have proven themselves to be capable in battle, and their teamwork is inspiring. The Brothers Ironwulf look almost indistinguishable from each other.

Erasmus. This **clockwork watchman** (see *Tome of Beasts*) has been with the ship for several years. The recent addition of the **clockwork soldier** (see *Creature Codex*) Number 76 to the crew initially excited Erasmus who longs to make friends with his aloof new companion. For its part, Number 76 feels that Erasmus is always staring creepily at it and feels uncomfortable around the other clockwork. Number 76 does not understand that Erasmus, as a watchman, has been designed to stare at everything and that he merely wishes to make conversation.

NAME	RACE	PLANE OF ORIGIN	QUIRK
A Sonnet to Indigo, Ship's Mage	**Far Wanderer** (CC)	Court of Countless Stars	Whispers to herself
Ahlis	Aasimar (**acolyte**)	Plane of Radiance	Sheds dim blue light
Bleak	**Dark Folk** (CC)	Mortal Realm	Grinds her teeth while rowing
Chitters	**Ratatosk** (ToB)	The Loom	Constantly interrupts conversations
Clara Vulksdottir	Human (**scout**)	Mortal Realm	Sings in battle
Corrack	**Cueyatl Warrior** (CC)	Plane of Water	Flicks tongue out constantly
Dhornvig Axeclaw	**Bearfolk** (ToB)	Mortal Realm	Rubs his poorly healed right knee often
Ennis Priory	Human (**bandit**)	Mortal Realm	Absently pats his pockets
Erasmus	**Clockwork Watchman***	Plane of Gears	Watches Number 76
Giltis Lesshaven	**Shadow Fey** (ToB)	Shadow Realm	Swears in Goblin
Ibisrix, Captain	**Incubus***	Abyss	Flips a coin to make decisions
Ick Tavers, Cook	**Shadow Goblin** (CC)	Shadow Realm	Giggles when frightened
Klar Ironwulf	Dwarf*	Mortal Realm	Scratches his head
Kror Ironwulf	Dwarf*	Mortal Realm	Strokes his beard
Lania Tradewinds, 1st mate	Shadow-Tainted Elf*	Mortal Realm	Gives coin to those down on their luck
Number 76	**Clockwork Soldier***	Plane of Gears	Tries to avoid being watched by Erasmus
Pia Belittsdottir	Human (**berserker**)	Mortal Realm	Wears a string of decaying fingers
Redfeather	**Aaracokra**	Plane of Air	Molts when excited
Salistree Sunhild	Elfmarked (**guard**)	Mortal Realm	Squints and frowns
Songbird	**Deva**	Heaven	Never speaks
Sten Fiendborn	Human (**gladiator**)	Eleven Hells	Smirks lecherously at males
Tavika Wolfbane, Ship Chirurgeon	Winterfolk Halfling*	Mortal Realm	Talks to her gull companion
Tyche Holland	Human (**guard**)	Mortal Realm	Smells faintly of cardamom
Yaniq Ut'Maru	Human (**guard**)	Mortal Realm	Bites his nails
Yorn Pettersen	Neverborn Human	Underworld	Smells of grave rot

* See description CC = *Creature Codex* ToB = *Tome of Beasts*

THE WONDROUS WOMEN OF PERUNALIA

by Lysa Chen

Sitting on the edge of the Crossroads along the shores of the Argent River is the Duchy of Perun's Daughter, a flourishing center of wisdom and learning distinguished in the region by its matriarchal and matrilineal culture. Perunalia is ruled by the demigod Duchess Vasilka Soulay, and women hold leadership roles in their households and in society as warriors, traders, scholars, and more.

Perunalia—named for the god of war and thunder—is perhaps best known for its amazon armies, which are called upon often to defend the duchy against raiding centaurs, dragon legions, and bandits of the Ruby Despotate. There is a strong tradition of archery among Perunalian women with girls enrolling in archery academies at the age of 14 or sometimes younger. Archers display their rank by adorning their bows with colorful feathers earned at the annual Duchess's Fair. A warrior bearing the red feather has mastered her weapon. More esteemed yet is the title of Grand Maiden earned by the champion of the Duchess's Fair.

Although Perun's Daughters are known for their skill with the bow, Perunalia's soldiers also are led by a society of female paladins known as the Order of the White Lions. These fierce and tactical generals and marshals excel at fighting in packs and combatting armies of humanoids, often men.

Despite the duchy's famed aptitude for war, Duchess Vasilka values culture, learning, art, and music above battle. Those who can afford an education at Perunalia's esteemed academies send their daughters from throughout the Crossroads to study mathematics, botany, agronomy, and architecture. The duchy also boasts the famous Perunalian Palatial Library in the royal palace. This treasure trove of ancient lore and knowledge reflects the level of education and literacy valued among Perunalia's women.

The brilliant, strong, and confident women of Perunalia are wondrous indeed.

PERUNALIAN ARCHER

Medium humanoid (human), lawful neutral

Armor Class 16 (studded leather)
Hit Points 90 (12d8 + 36)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	18 (+4)	16 (+3)	11 (+0)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Str +2, Dex +6
Skills Acrobatics +6, Perception +5
Senses passive Perception 15
Languages Common
Challenge 4 (1,100 XP)

Fast Draw. The archer has advantage on initiative rolls.

Longbow Adept. The archer has a +2 bonus to hit when she attacks with her longbow and deals one extra die of damage when she hits with it (included in the attack).

ACTIONS

Multiattack. The archer makes two attacks with her longbow.

Shortsword. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6 + 4) piercing damage.

Longbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack*: +8 to hit, range 150/600 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (2d8 + 4) piercing damage.

RED FEATHER ARCHER

Medium humanoid (human), lawful neutral

Armor Class 17 (studded leather)

Hit Points 204 (24d8 + 96)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	20 (+5)	18 (+4)	13 (+1)	18 (+4)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Str +4, Dex +9

Skills Acrobatics +9, Perception +8

Senses passive Perception 18

Languages Common
Challenge 11 (7,200 XP)

Fast Draw. The archer has advantage on initiative rolls.

Longbow Expert. The archer has a +3 bonus to hit when she attacks with her longbow and deals two extra dice of damage when she hits with it (included in the attack).

Actions

Multiattack. The archer makes two attacks with her longbow and one attack with her trick shot.

Shortsword. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d6 + 5) piercing damage.

Longbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack*: +12 to hit, range 150/600 ft., one target. *Hit:* 18 (3d8 + 5) piercing damage.

Trick Shot. The archer makes an attack with her longbow and chooses one of the following effects if she hits:

- The target must make a DC 17 Dexterity saving throw, taking 18 (4d8) piercing damage on a failed save or half as much damage on a successful one.
- Creatures within 5 feet of the target must succeed a DC 17 Dexterity saving throw or take 4 (1d8) piercing damage.
- The archer can forgo damaging the target to use a special arrow that lassos the creature instead. The creature is restrained. It can use its action to attempt to break its bonds with a successful DC 17 Strength (Athletics) check.

GRAND MAIDEN ARCHER

Medium humanoid (human), lawful neutral

Armor Class 18 (studded leather)
Hit Points 340 (40d8 + 160)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
11 (+0)	22 (+6)	18 (+4)	13 (+1)	18 (+4)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Str +6, Dex +12
Skills Acrobatics +12, Perception +10
Senses passive Perception 20
Languages Common
Challenge 17 (18,000 XP)

Fast Draw. The archer has advantage on initiative rolls.

Leader of Archers (3/Day). As a bonus action, the archer can direct other friendly archers within 10 feet to strike. The archers must be able to see and hear the grand maiden archer. The archers can immediately use their reactions to make one weapon attack.

Longbow Expert. The archer has a +3 bonus to hit when she attacks with her longbow and deals two extra dice of damage when she hits with it (included in the attack).

Magical Weapons. The archer's weapon attacks are magical.

Actions

Multiattack. The archer makes three attacks with her longbow.

Shortsword. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +12 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 9 (1d6 + 6) piercing damage.

Longbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack*: +15 to hit, range 150/600 ft., one target. *Hit:* 19 (3d8 + 6) piercing damage. If the archer hits her target, she can choose one of the following effects:

- The target must make a DC 19 Dexterity saving throw, taking 18 (4d8) thunder damage on a failed save or half as much damage on a successful one. On a failed save, the target is also deafened until the end of its next turn.
- Creatures within 5 feet of the target must succeed a DC 19 Dexterity saving throw or take 9 (d8) piercing damage.
- The archer uses a special arrow laced with a potent herbal substance. The target must succeed a DC 19 Constitution saving throw or be stunned until the end of its next turn.

Legendary Actions

The archer can take three legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The archer regains spent legendary actions at the start of their turn.

Attack. The archer makes a ranged weapon attack with her longbow.

Move. The archer moves up to 30 feet without provoking opportunity attacks.

Lightning Arrow (2 Actions). The archer shoots a Perun-blessed arrow that creates a stroke of lightning 5 feet wide and 60 feet long. Each creature in the line must make a DC 19 Dexterity saving throw. A creature takes 28 (8d6) lightning damage on a failed save or half as much damage on a successful one.

WHITE LION PALADIN OF PERUN

Medium humanoid (human), lawful good

Armor Class 16 (chain shirt, shield)
Hit Points 143 (22d8 + 44)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	11 (+0)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)

Saving Throws Wis +5, Cha +6
Skills Athletics +6, Intimidation +6
Senses passive Perception 12
Languages Common
Challenge 6 (2,300 XP)

Pack Tactics. The paladin has advantage on an attack roll against a creature if at least one of the paladin's allies is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

White Lion's Smite. Once per turn, when the paladin hits a creature with a melee weapon attack, she can deal 13 (3d8) radiant damage to the target. This damage is increased to 18 (4d8) radiant damage if the target is an undead, fiend, or evil humanoid.

Actions

Multiattack. The paladin makes three melee attacks.

Longsword. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d8 + 3) slashing damage.

Reactions

Riposte. When a creature misses the paladin with a melee attack, the paladin can use her reaction to make a melee weapon attack against the creature.

WHITE LION GENERAL OF PERUN

Medium humanoid (human), lawful good

Armor Class 18 (plate)
Hit Points 270 (36d8 + 108)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
20 (+5)	14 (+2)	16 (+3)	11 (+0)	14 (+2)	18 (+4)

Saving Throws Wis +6, Cha +8
Skills Athletics +9, Intimidation +8
Senses passive Perception 12
Languages Common
Challenge 12 (8,400 XP)

Improved White Lion's Smite. Once per turn, when the paladin hits a creature with a melee weapon attack, she can deal 22 (5d8) radiant damage to the target. This damage is increased to 27 (6d8) radiant damage if the target is an undead, fiend, or evil humanoid.

Lion's Roar (1/Day). As a bonus action, the paladin can unleash a mighty lion's roar that bolsters her allies. Creatures the paladin chooses who can hear the paladin and within 30 feet gain 7 (2d6) temporary hit points.

Pack Tactics. The paladin has advantage on an attack roll against a creature if at least one of the paladin's allies is within 5 feet of the creature and the ally isn't incapacitated.

Actions

Multiattack. The paladin makes three melee attacks.

Perun-Blessed Greatsword. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (2d6 + 5) slashing damage plus 5 (1d10) thunder damage.

PERUNALIAN MATHEMATICIAN

Medium humanoid (human), lawful neutral

Armor Class 12
Hit Points 82 (15d8 + 15)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
9 (−1)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	18 (+4)	14 (+2)	9 (−1)

Saving Throws Int +6, Wis +4
Skills Arcana +6, History +6, Perception +4

Senses passive Perception 14
Languages Common, Draconic, Elvish
Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Master Logician. The mathematician has advantage on ability checks that involve solving puzzles.

Smarty Pants (3/Day). The mathematician excels at telling others how they can be more effective. If the mathematician can see a creature and the creature can hear the mathematician, the mathematician can use her reaction to add 1d6 to that creature's attack roll, ability check, or saving throw.

Actions

Abacus. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +1 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 2 (1d6 − 1) bludgeoning damage.

Eureka (1/Day). The mathematician discovers a breakthrough that aids her allies. She can choose one of the following:

- The mathematician solves a puzzle.
- The mathematician shares three facts about a society, territory, or creature.
- The mathematician predicts whether a specific course of action taken within the next 24 hours will have good results, bad results, both, or neither.

Number Babble. The mathematician rambles about her latest mathematical query, possibly exhausting the minds of those around her. Creatures that can hear the mathematician and within 20 feet of her must succeed a DC 13 Intelligence saving throw or gain one level of exhaustion as their minds strain to make sense of the mathematician's jabber. If a creature's saving throw is successful, they are immune to the mathematician's Number Babble for the next 24 hours.

PERUNALIAN BOTANIST

Medium humanoid (human), lawful neutral

Armor Class 12
Hit Points 110 (20d8 + 20)
Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
12 (+1)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	10(+0)	18 (+4)	9 (−1)

Saving Throws Int +2, Wis +6
Skills Medicine +6, Nature +2, Perception +6
Senses passive Perception 16
Languages Common
Challenge 3 (700 XP)

Master Gardener. The botanist has advantage on Intelligence (Nature) checks in regards to plants.

Spellcasting. The botanist is a 5th-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 14, +6 to hit with spell attacks). She knows the following druid spells:

Cantrips (at will): *druidcraft, guidance, thorn whip*
1st level (4 slots): *detect poison and disease, entangle, goodberry, purify food and drink*
2nd level (3 slots): *barkskin, protection from poison, spike growth*
3rd level (2 slots): *plant growth, speak with plants*

Actions

Sickle. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +3 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 3 (1d4 + 1) piercing damage.

Horrible Herbs. *Ranged Weapon Attack*: +4 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 5 (1d6 + 2) poison damage. The target must succeed a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned for 1 minute. The botanist can choose one of the following effects for the creature while it is poisoned:

- The creature is distracted by swirling hallucinations. It is incapacitated and has a speed of 0. This effect ends if the creature takes any damage or if someone else uses an action to shake the creature out of its stupor.
- The creature begins babbling and is incapable of normal speech or spellcasting. The creature can repeat the saving throw at the start of its turn, ending the effect on a success.
- The creature takes 1 poison damage at the start of its turn.

Spores, Spores, Everywhere (1/Day). The botanist causes spores to erupt from a point it can see within 60 feet. Creatures in a 10-feet radius of that point must succeed a DC 13 Constitution saving throw or be overtaken by the spores. A creature controlled by the spores must use its action on its next turn to attack the nearest creature other than itself.

PRIESTESS OF PERUN

Medium humanoid (human), lawful neutral

Armor Class 18 (plate)

Hit Points 195 (30d8 + 60)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	10 (+0)	14 (+2)	12 (+1)	20 (+5)	10 (+0)

Saving Throws Cha +4, Wis +9

Skills History +9, Insight +9, Religion +9

Senses passive Perception 15

Languages Common

Challenge 9 (5,000 XP)

Spellcasting. The priestess is a 13th-level spellcaster. Her spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 17, +9 to hit with spell attacks). She knows the following cleric spells:

Cantrips (at will): *guidance, light, sacred flame, thaumaturgy*

1st level (4 slots): *bless, cure wounds, healing word, protect from evil and good, shield of faith*

2nd level (3 slots): *calm emotions, hold person, lesser restoration, spiritual weapon*

3rd level (3 slots): *dispel magic, mass healing word, remove curse, spiritual guardians*

4th level (3 slots): *death ward*

5th level (2 slots): *greater restoration, mass cure wounds*

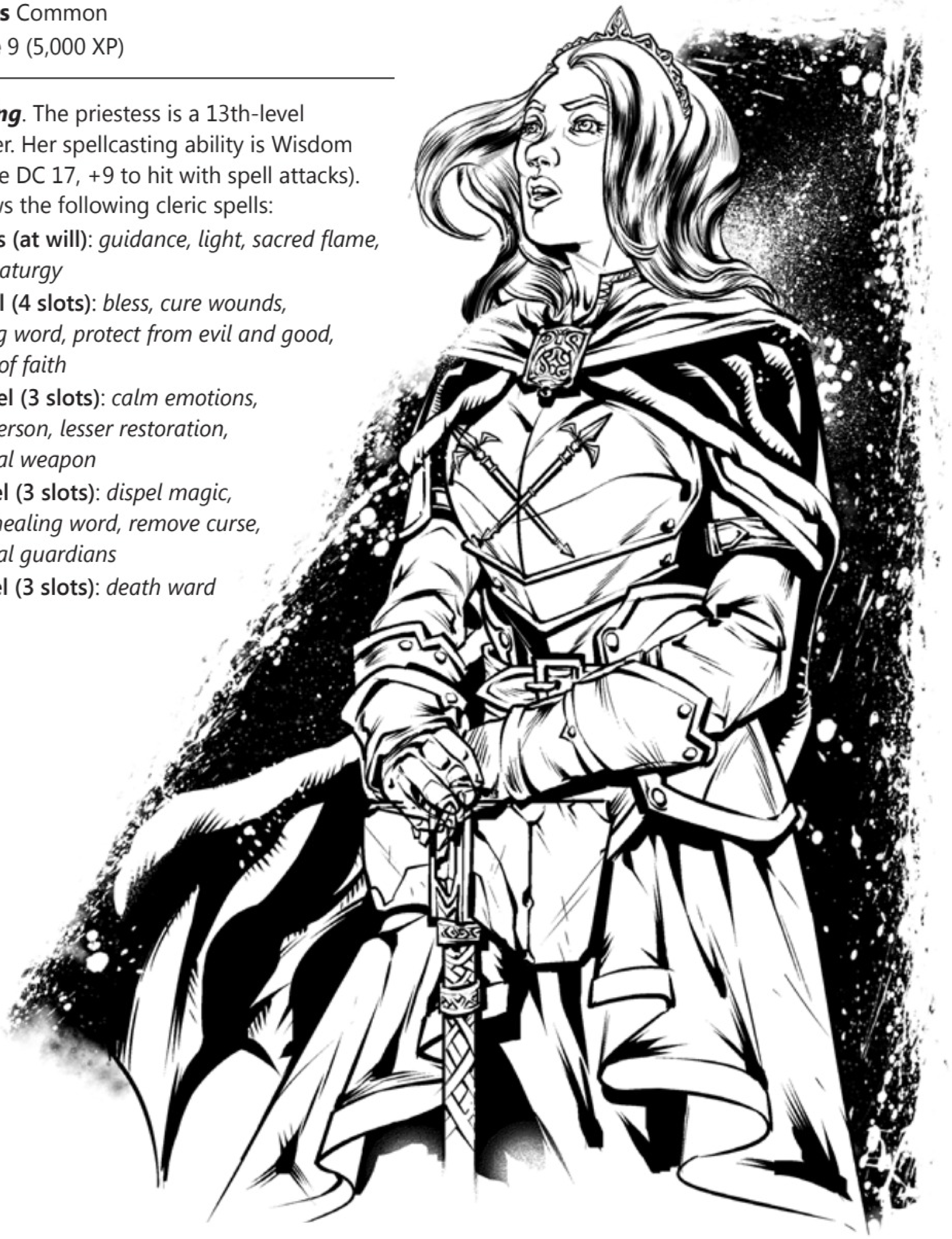
6th level (1 slot): *divine word*

7th level (1 slot): *resurrection*

Actions

Multiattack. The priestess makes two melee attacks.

Perun-Blessed Warhammer. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +7 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d10 + 3) bludgeoning damage plus 21 (3d10 + 5) thunder damage.



Reactions

Perun's Fury. When a creature within 5 feet of the priestess hits her with an attack, the priestess can deal 9 (2d8) thunder damage.

Legendary Actions

The priestess can take three legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. The priestess regains spent legendary actions at the start of her turn.

Attack. The priestess makes a melee weapon attack with her warhammer.

Move. The priestess moves up to 30 feet without provoking opportunity attacks.

Healing Rain (2 Actions). The priestess creates a 10-foot-radius rain cloud, hovering 20 feet above the ground at a point she can see within 60 feet. Creatures underneath the cloud regain 14 (2d8 + 5) hit points.

DUCHESS VASILKA SOULAY

Medium celestial, lawful neutral

Armor Class 22 (natural armor)

Hit Points 630 (60d8 + 360)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	29 (+9)	22 (+6)	20 (+5)	26 (+8)	22 (+6)

Saving Throws Dex +17, Int +13, Wis +16, Cha +14

Skills Acrobatics +17, History, +16, Insight +16, Perception +16

Damage Resistances lightning, thunder

Damage Immunities bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical weapons

Condition Immunities charmed, exhaustion, frightened

Senses truesight 120 ft., passive Perception 26

Languages Celestial, Common, Elvish

Challenge 26 (90,000 XP)

Innate Spellcasting. Vasilka's innate spellcasting ability is Wisdom (spell save DC 24, +16 to hit with spell attacks). She can cast the following spells, requiring no material components:

At will: *comprehend languages, detect magic, identify, thunderwave*

3/day each: *call lightning, detect thoughts, sleet storm*

1/day each: *fire storm, storm of vengeance*

Legendary Resistance (3/Day). If Vasilka fails a saving throw, she can choose to succeed instead.

Magic Resistance. Vasilka has advantage on saving throws against spells and other magical effects.

Thunderous Weapons. Vasilka's weapon attacks are magical. When she hits with any weapon, the weapon deals an extra 36 (8d8) thunder damage (included in the weapon attacks below).

Actions

Multiattack. Vasilka attacks twice with her shortsword or her longbow and uses her Ancient Lullaby.

Shortsword. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +17 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 12 (1d6 + 9) piercing damage plus 36 (8d8) thunder damage.

Longbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack*: +17 to hit, range 150/600 ft., one target. *Hit:* 13 (1d8 + 9) piercing damage plus 36 (8d8) thunder damage.

Ancient Lullaby. Vasilka chooses one creature she can see within 100 feet and fills its head with a soothing Elvish lullaby. The creature must succeed a DC 24 Wisdom saving throw or fall unconscious for 1 minute. The effect ends if the creature takes any damage or if someone else uses an action to shake the creature awake. Creatures immune to being charmed aren't affected.

Legendary Actions

Vasilka can take two legendary actions choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. Vasilka regains spent legendary actions at the start of her turn.

Storm Song. Vasilka chooses a creature within 150 feet that she can see and strikes it with lightning. The target takes 10d8 lightning damage on a failed save or half as much damage on a successful one.

Song of Flight. Vasilka sings a literally uplifting tune. A creature of Vasilka's choosing that can hear her, including herself, gains the power of flight as if under a fly spell until the end of Vasilka's next turn.

TINTAGER'S MOUNTED MAGES

by Troy E. Taylor

The perceived threat of fey invasion has long concerned Allain. For those residing within the Iron Metropolis of Tintager, the concern is obsessive.

Prominent among the city's Feywarden defenders are war mages who belong to cavalry-focused martial orders. The mounted war mages inspire awe: not only do they charge across the battlefield in a thundering of hooves, they have destructive magic at their command.

Rivalries between the orders are legendary. But when there is a call to defend Allain, petty disputes are set aside.

Part 1: Generalities About the Orders

Members of the orders devote themselves to prowess in the saddle and to study of the arcane. These spellcasting knights live austere lives—something akin to monasticism. No vow binds them to chastity or poverty, but common cause, hard work, and their devotion to the homeland is enough for most to adopt such trappings.

Race and gender are generally no barrier to recruitment with elves being an obvious exception.

Theirs is not a solitary existence. Members share a strong fraternal bond. They encourage one another to be steadfast and true, aid in each other's training and development, and celebrate demonstrations of valor.

The Ninemage Council allows the orders to govern themselves and operate with a semblance of independence. But the council places a singular check on their activities: each order must maintain a fortification along the boundary with the Arbonesse.

The council believes the forts are a deterrent against elvish invasion. Decades without an incursion has reinforced that belief.

The unstated reason, however, is to keep the orders from acquiring too much wealth or political influence. The construction, staffing, and upkeep of these castles require considerable sums. Coin that can't be spent currying favor and influence. Each castle also serves as a headquarters, keeping the leaders occupied and away from the capital politics.

Having to defend fixed positions runs contrary to the basic strategy of mounted units using their mobility and spells to control areas on the battlefield. Those tasked with formulating military strategy for the orders are fully aware of conundrum. It is understood by all that the fortifications would be expendable in an invasion.

Part 2: Existing Orders of Mounted Feywardens

Here are some of the mounted orders of war mages in Tintager.

BOOKBINDERS

The Bookbinders formed when women and men of Tintager's bookbinding guild took up arms when ordinary citizenry were mustered for the common defense.

Many who answered the call could cast spells, even if their aptitude was limited to cantrips. A large segment of this guild remained in armed service after the emergency ended.

At first, the Bookbinders tried to find a place among existing orders. But they met resistance wherever they applied.

Unwanted, the members forged their own order and assumed the responsibility of serving as long-range scouts. But even taking up this task seemed to irritate many of the other Feywardens. The mages of Tintager didn't want to admit that their diviners couldn't provide military intelligence. They thought the Bookbinder scouts were superfluous.

The Bookbinders won over the doubters. There were instances when Tintager scrying could not pierce the veil of elf glamour. Bookbinder patrols filled the gap, providing news of enemy movements when diviners in high towers could not. In skirmishes, the Bookbinders made strategic assessments about terrain and enemy force configurations and then conveyed that information with a martial context that was unmatched.

The Bookbinders are presently without two of its top leaders. The human grand master, Mika "Ol' Stitcher" Sardanels, died during the winter. The human seneschal, Kendra Sveldendauttir, feels she was too old to assume the mantle and has resigned, so the order can appoint two younger leaders.

CASSILON BRIGADE

The Cassilon Brigade claims to be an ancient order. Stretching back to a misty past, the order traces its origins to monks from the Sun Kingdom of Cassilon. For reasons not completely understood, these monks served in old Caelmarath, the kingdom along the Arbonesse border that predated the magocracies.

Historians are admittedly confused about the brigade's allegiances, noting that Cassilon and Andarre were allied against Caelmarath during the Great Mage Wars.

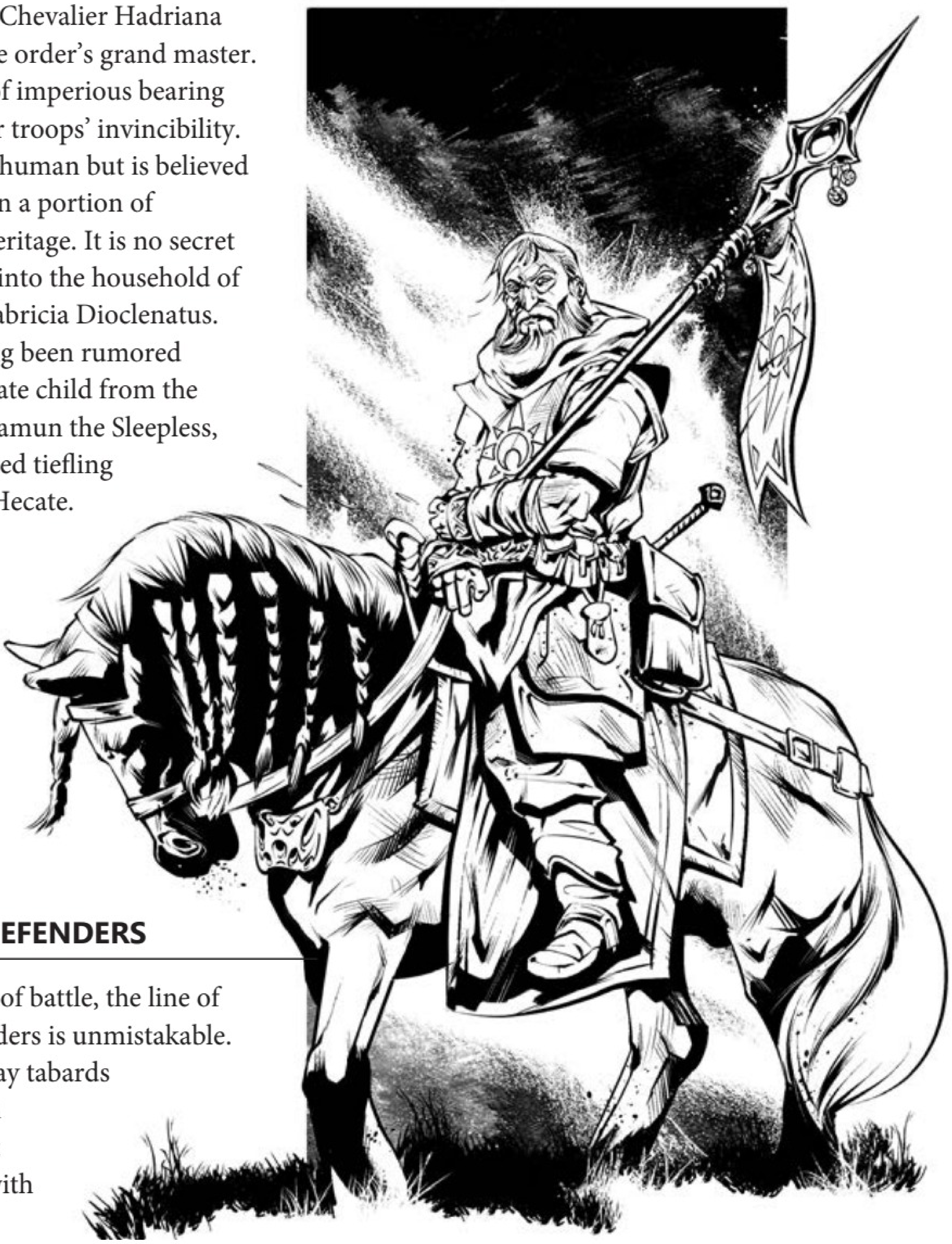
Rigorous students of history have suggested that the Cassilon Brigade was not an order of mage knights as it now purports. Rather, it was a mercenary company that lost a sultan's protection in the Sun Kingdom. Unwelcome, the band became sellswords to rival magocracies.

During the Great Mage Wars, the Cassilon Brigade fractured into a number of martial groups and honorific societies, some of which did not even have military responsibilities. For a time, remnant chapters in Carnessa, Uxloon, and Cassilon all considered themselves heirs to the original brigade. Only the chapter in Allain survived. Even so, the Allain chapter did not resemble the current brigade. Barely a handful of spellcasters served at one time. It was clearly an infantry unit that fought mostly in skirmishes and on the sidelines of great battles.

Yet perhaps because of that, the Allain chapter avoided being wiped out. Over time, the Cassilon Brigade embraced some of its heritage, adding rituals and trappings to its deeds and horsemanship to its repertoire.

Today, the Cassilon Brigade always looks the part of an elite cavalry unit: its commanders wear plumed helmets, sit tall in saddles adorned with jewels, and standard bearers proudly wave the nine-star pennant of Allain. Nearly half of its members are spellcasters. It is supported by an elite corps of minotaur infantry.

Thaumaturgist-Chevalier Hadriana Dioclenatus is the order's grand master. She is a woman of imperious bearing who boasts of her troops' invincibility. She is outwardly human but is believed to have more than a portion of demonmarked heritage. It is no secret she was adopted into the household of Allain warlock Fabricia Dioclenatus. Hadriana has long been rumored to be an illegitimate child from the household of Erramun the Sleepless, the much respected tiefling wizard-cleric of Hecate.



COLD IRON DEFENDERS

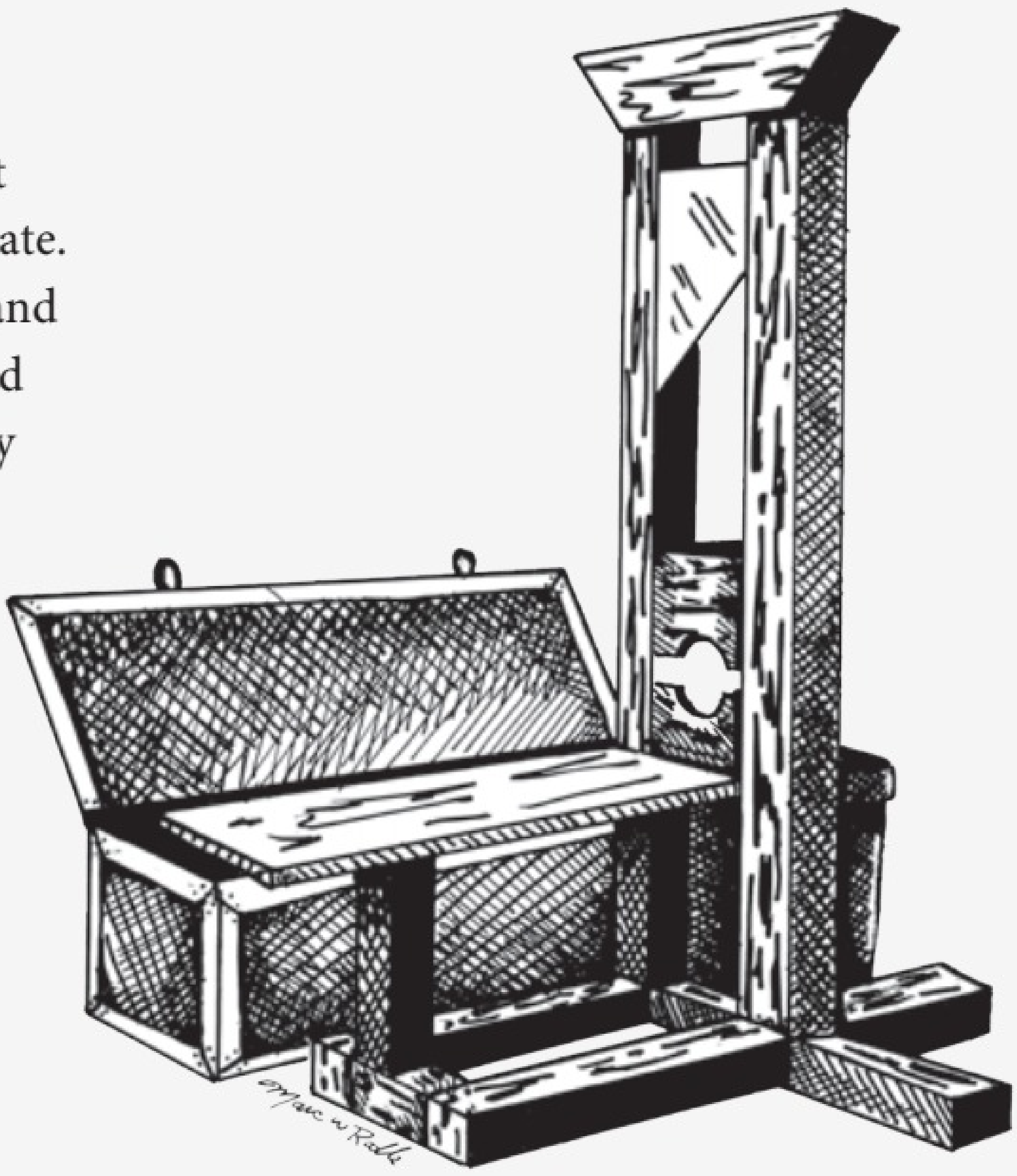
Seen on the field of battle, the line of Cold Iron Defenders is unmistakable. War mages in gray tabards emblazoned with a crimson star sit astride mounts with roan coats. Their lances are tipped in cold iron and adorned with pennants of that same gray and crimson.

COLD IRON WEAPONS

Fey monsters that have immunity or resistance to nonmagical weapons are ofttimes susceptible to cold iron weapons, so cautious adventurers should invest extra coin to plate their weapons with cold iron. You can plate cold iron onto a single metal weapon or ten pieces of metal ammunition for twice the cost of a normal weapon. This cost represents not only the price of the cold iron but the time and expertise needed to add cold iron to the weapons without making it less effective.

THE KEYHOLDERS OF HECATE

About 300 years ago, the most prominent military order was the Keyholders of Hecate. The Keyholders were famed for courage and tenacity, fighting even when outnumbered three-to-one. The order had an exemplary record of chivalry.



The Keyholders were originally lancers tasked with escorting spellcasters as conditions deteriorated in the western lands. After admitting spellcasters, the order expanded to securing trade between the cities of the magocracies. The order, acting fully as a mage-protection service tied to trade, effectively became a bank. It acquired riches—and influence—rapidly.

Two personalities then came into conflict: the Bemmean architect of the magocracy, Exarch Vermes II, and grand mistress of the Keyholders, Chassiopeia Pyrah. The dispute crystalized once Pyrah demanded seats on the council for both herself and the order's seneschal, Varanar Thane.

At the time, the Keyholders seemed unassailable. The order's riders had a reputation for personal integrity. Compared with Vermes's "less virtuous" approach to governance, there was a sharp contrast.

Vermes did not tolerate the Keyholders' demands. A group of demonmarked warriors and casters personally loyal to the exarch raided the Keyholders' compound. They arrested all the knights and confiscated the property. Under interrogation, Pyrah confessed to a series of crimes. The most grievous admission was that the order's good deeds were a cover for collusion with the enemy. That included worshipping elven gods, such as Charon, Yarila and Porevit, and Sarastra. War trophies the order had acquired in battle against the Arbonesse elves were presented as "evidence" of this betrayal. Under duress, members signed confessions stating that "raids" into enemy territory were really meetings with elf paramours.

At her execution, Pyrah recanted her signed confession. She underestimated Vermes, she said. She thought the arrest was a personal vendetta. By assuming all blame, she hoped to spare the other knights and preserve the Keyholders. She failed to see that Vermes wanted the entire order dissolved, leaving no doubt as to who was in charge of the magocracy.

"I lied and am undone by that lie," she said to the crowd. "But the greatest lie is that Keyholders aided the nation's enemy. On the contrary, we faltered in the face of it and failed you, the people of Allain, by our inaction."

The other orders fell in line quickly. Vermes's demonmarked patrol became a new military order known as the Dedicated, the only Feywarden group devoted to internal security.

When the Long Steel Line charges, observers say it cuts through the enemy as clean as a breeze on a crisp autumn morning. If any order puts a premium on horsemanship over magic, it is most certainly the Defenders.

The order was founded by squire-adepts in service to knights of the Keyholders. When their masters were felled by a volley from elven archers, the youths jumped in the empty saddles and charged as one across a muddy field. By the time they reached the line, their once-white tabards were caked gray by the mud of the black soil. They turned the tide of battle with their courage and ferocity.

Despite their heroics, the Keyholder's seneschal refused to promote the squire-adepts. He said their magical training was incomplete. In protest, the squires quit the order and formed their own.

The Defenders' current grand master is the black-eyed tiefling incantrix Wahlburga, often called the Unyielding. Unlike the grand masters of other orders who delegate the task of battlefield commander, she takes the field. Her only concession to field command is to bear a *staff of frost* instead of a lance. Her personal crest—a black horse rampant—is superimposed upon the crimson star of her tabard.

LORESWORN LANCES

For purposes of guarding the Arbonesse, the Lances are considered a reserve unit. It maintains fresh horses and a rested brigade at all times at its castle south of Tintager.

The Lances are mostly concerned with missions into the goblin wastes. They have a reputation for fearlessness. In the past, the Lancers were commissioned by archmages to provide security while they investigated Dread Walker locations.

The Lances' newfound purpose is also in the Wastes, devoted to tracking down and apprehending the renegade cleric Batzas Anthemius, fighting the forces of the goblin spiritual leader Tivishta Trinkinta, or tracking forces of the goblin warlord Braagezz.

The Lances employ a host of rangers and a handful of druids. As anyone who has ridden on a Lances' expedition can attest, the rangers occupy the position of rugged, war-wise sergeants to the more refined and educated war-mage officers.

War mages in the order are expected to cultivate their intellects. This reputation for scholarship has produced some of the best histories of the Great Mage Wars. The other orders dislike the Loresworn Lances because their objective conclusions usually poke holes in the more romantic histories the various orders maintain about themselves.

Reasoner Grist, a human with Bourglund roots, is the group's grand master. Grist is encouraging war mages to take spouses and to start families. Grist believes that spousal bonds make for more determined knights.

LUMINOUS ORDER OF STARCHARGERS

Few orders are shrouded in secrecy to the extent of the Luminous Order of Starchargers. No visitors from outside the order are permitted within the sleek stone walls of its fortress, situated on a ley line northwest of Tintager, adjacent to the Arbonesse Court of Roses.

The one exception to this rule, apparently, is the cantankerous human archmage Malkot Ebonstaff, who visits whenever "the stars are in alignment." Speculation has run rampant that he is the grand master of the order, the only leader of a martial order to have a place on the Ninemage Council. Malkot makes vociferous his denials, which to the conspiracy-minded of Allain only seems to confirm their wild speculations.

In truth, the grand master is a halfling spellcaster, Toscas the Nightweaver, who hasn't left the fortress in five decades. Instead of commanding armies in the field, Toscas is preoccupied with personally training war mages in combating the dark mysteries of the void.

The order is focused on void-spawned threats, such as the Dread Walker Y'gurdraketh. The order makes many secret forays across the border to study this 100-foot-tall tentacled monstrosity.

The Starchargers have a curious standard, fashioned after the Shield of Allain. However, only one star in the circle of nine on the midnight blue field is gold, the other eight are a dark gray.

SUCCOR OF IBIS

The Succor of Ibis is different in that it promotes divine spellcasters within its ranks, an acknowledgement of the role clerics of Thoth-Hermes played in its founding.

It is also different because the order only initiates members who have been infected with a disease.

Calling themselves the Afflicted, these warrior mages are also indoctrinated into the worship of Thoth-Hermes. In a strict sense, all the warrior-mages thus become apostles of the Master of the Arcane Realms.

They vow to assist any who require healing for any diseases of the mind or body. Many of their missions are those of hospitality. Clerics of any faith (not just Thoth-Hermes) who take vows to serve as battlefield healers are cherished.

Sebni, a craggy-faced veteran campaigner, is the grand master. He is the grandson of Southlands immigrants, possessing an aptitude for abjuration magic. Influenced by tales of his family's homeland, he has introduced the use of camels as supplementary mounts and is training aerialists in the use of griffons and pegasi.

THE DEDICATED

Most of its members are demonmarked. Each swears a personal oath of loyalty to Exarch Vermes II.

All the other orders are united in their loathing for members of the Dedicated, who enforce the tangled legal code that governs the magocracy. The Dedicated are not a police force that regulates ordinary citizens however. It is tasked with investigating infractions among the martial orders. In particular, the Dedicated takes note of the activities of the various grand masters.

Dedicated soldiers reputedly receive substandard training. The other orders consider it a nuisance, but one that cannot be underestimated. The fate of the Keyholders has never been forgotten. Still, most would prefer the Dedicated direct its considerable resources toward policing the border instead of other orders.

Destrier Doyen Nybachus Fozreh is the order's grand master. Fozreh's title to the contrary, the demonmarked warlock has never actually been seen astride a horse. His spellcasting range is not great, but the spells he does cast are delivered with great potency.

Part 3: Magic of the War Mages

A few examples of magic used by the war mages:

COMMANDER'S PAVILION

3rd-level conjuration (ritual)

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Touch

Components: V, S, M (a tassel from a tent and a strip of cloth matching the commander's banner or uniform)

Duration: 24 hours

Creates a command tent 30 feet by 30 feet with a peak height of 20 feet. It is filled with items a military commander might require of a headquarters tent on a campaign, such as maps of the area, a spyglass, a sandglass, materials for correspondence, references for coding and decoding messages, books on history and strategy relevant to the area, banners, spare uniforms, and badges of rank. Such minor mundane items dissipate once the spell's effect ends.

Recasting the spell on subsequent days maintains the existing tent for another 24 hours.

FEATHER FIELD

1st-level abjuration

Casting Time: 1 reaction, which you take when you are hit by a ranged attack by a magical weapon or targeted by an Elvish Veteran Archer's Volley

Range: Self

Components: V, S, M (fletching from an arrow)

Duration: 1 round

A magical barrier of chaff in the form of feathers appears and protects you. Until the start of your next turn, you have a +5 bonus to AC against ranged attacks by magical weapons or weapons whose ranged attacks are considered magical, such as volley attacks by an elvish veteran archers or deathsworn elves*.

At Higher Levels. When you cast *feather field* using a spell slot of 2nd level or higher, the duration is increased by 1 round for each level.

*The elvish veteran archer is an NPC creature from *Tome of Beasts*; the deathsworn elf is a creature from *Creature Codex*.

WHO GOES THERE?

5th-level conjuration

Casting Time: 10 minutes

Range: 60 feet

Components: V, S, M (a flour sifter)

Duration: Concentration, up to 10 minutes

You sift the surrounding air for sound wave remnants of recent conversations to discern passwords or other important information gleaned from a conversation, such as by guards on a picket line.

The spell creates a cloud of words in the caster's mind, assigning relevance to them. Selecting the correct word or phrase is not foolproof, but you can make an educated guess.

You make a Wisdom (Perception) check against the target person's Wisdom score (DC 10, if not specified) to successfully pick the key word or phrase.

Ley Line Fuse Trap

Simple trap (level 5 to 10), dangerous threat

A mage who can cast a ley energy bolt at 4th level or higher can set a booby trap of knotted ley line energy along a known ley line.

Trigger. Any spellcaster who attempts to tap or harness a ley line's energy within 6 miles of the trap triggers the fuse, which comes back in 1d6 rounds.

Effect. A 60-foot cube of ley energy erupts around the original caster. Each creature in the area must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw, taking 6d8 damage on a failed save or half as much on a successful save.

Countermeasures. A successful DC 15 Wisdom (Perception) check reveals a disruption in the ley field. A successful DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check reveals the magical nature of the trap. A successful *dispel magic* (DC 15) or successful *ley disruption* spell cast on the ley line destroys the trap.

Special. Casting *ley sense* does not reveal the fuse trap, only the presence of a ley line.

Author's Note: Special thanks to Ben McFarland, who served as a sounding board for discussing war mage magic.

LEGENDARY WORKS OF ARSHIN THE ENCHANTER

by Jon Sawatsky

Infernist, madman, binder, crackpot, genius, saint: all these titles and more were set upon the shoulders of Arshin, legendary enchanter of the Winewood. Here, in your hands, is a tome containing information on the man, his followers, and his great works of magic. Though we concern ourselves here with his most famous creations, the prolific magic tamer produced countless strange and wondrous treasures throughout his lifetime. Your adventurers might unknowingly possess one of his works at this very moment! Best to bargain in good faith with the enigmatic Seekers should they come to claim it . . .

Arshin of Winewood

The old enchanter is dead, his remains entombed at the site of his workshop and home in the fantastical forest known as the Winewood. While his followers, the obsessive Devotees of Arshin, remember the man for his wisdom and humor, his true legacy is the assortment of magical objects he created over his lifetime. A few of these Devotees have taken up residence in his workshop, keeping it clean and preserved—precisely as Arshin left it when he died.

The entrance to the workshop is built into the base of a mammoth tree stump surrounded by a labyrinthine, stone maze. The underground rooms of his residence are far from cold and rooty; instead, cheery vistas spring into being as one travels from chamber to chamber. The enchanted pigments Arshin created to construct these living paintings are the prized possession of any artist lucky enough to find them.

The woods around the enchanter's residence have been transformed by the constant exposure to magic. The night flowers cast a dim light when they bloom, illuminating the trees in blue and violet hues. Insects with sparking wings flit audibly through the undergrowth and rare beetles capable of telekinesis weave living branches into nests high in the canopy. Fey creatures are drawn to the Winewood, a fact that the keepers of Arshin's estate use to their advantage as their master did before them.

Though the man has passed on, his works persist, plotting their own courses through the world. Some of his objects serve as heirlooms and status symbols while others remain lost in the shadowy places of the world. A lucky few have even found his creations in markets, hiding in plain sight beside mundane urns and pitted blades.

Devotees of Arshin

Devotees of Arshin are best described as ardent fans of the enchanter's work. Why some women and men become so obsessed is unknown. Some claim it's a kind of madness, a prospector's fever that sets in and doesn't let go. Devotees are loosely divided into two factions: those who tend his estate, protecting its walls and contents, and those who scour the world in search of his lost works. The former call themselves the Keepers, and like monks in a monastery, their travels beyond the Winewood are few. They live among the magic-infused trees and commune with the fey things that dwell in the forest. The latter are known as the Seekers, and they travel to the ends of the world and beyond to reclaim the enchanter's treasures. They believe their task is above most laws and employ whatever tactic necessary to secure Arshin's works.

The Seekers bring their recovered items back to the Keepers, who stash them away in vaults hidden throughout the Winewood. These troves draw greedy explorers and curious adventurers alike into the forest, most of whom are never heard from again.

As Allies

Devotees of Arshin can be molded into a neutral good organization that is obsessively dedicated to the enchanter, his workshop, and his works. They may welcome travelers to small outposts in the Winewood where they trade the non-Arshin-made wondrous items the Seekers have collected in their travels. They may lend or even grant one of Arshin's magical items to those opposing great evil. They might hire stalwart adventurers to deal with threats to the forest or to embark on a dangerous quest to recover one of the enchanter's treasures. As allies and pro-social NPCs, devotees behave like a high-functioning cult—dedicated to their dead patron but not outwardly violent as they carry out their business. As allies to the good folk of the world, devotees venerate Arshin and believe that his magic brings light and wonder to the world.

As Villains

Devotees of Arshin can be presented as a nefarious organization willing to do anything to recover its patron's powerful objects. The Winewood is a twisting and perilous place, filled with sharp-toothed fey and beasts bristling with dangerous magic. Neutral evil devotees dislike outsiders, who they believe come to steal their treasure and delay their ultimate end: to resurrect Arshin as a powerful lich. The Seekers act as burglars, assassins, and extortionists, hunting down their lost treasures with no regard for the lives of those in their way. As villains, devotees are a cunning cult whose stronghold is the workshop and estate of their late master.

DEVOTEE OF ARSHIN

NE or NG humanoid (any race, size varies)

Armor Class 13 (studded leather)

Hit Points 55 (11d8)

Speed 30 ft. (varies by race)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
14 (+2)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)	16 (+3)	10 (+0)	11 (+0)

Skills Arcana +5

Senses varies by race, passive Perception 12

Languages Common, Draconic or Sylvan (see below)

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Focus Bearer. The devotee carries and is attuned to an enchanted focus which grants the devotee access to three cantrips. The chosen cantrips can come from a single spell list or a mix of any three. The spells are cast innately (spell save DC 13, +5 to hit with spell attacks), requiring only verbal components. The focus can be any small object such as a ring, carved figurine, or polished stone. Only the devotee can attune to the focus and use its power.

We Serve in Different Ways. Each devotee represents one of two archetypes. Choose one of the following traits:

- ***Keeper***. Three times per day when making a spell attack, the devotee gains advantage on the attack . Additionally, the devotee receives

a +4 bonus on Dexterity (Stealth) checks and gains Sylvan as a bonus language.
- ***Seeker***. The devotee gains +10 ft. to its speed, advantage on Wisdom (Survival) checks, and a +4 bonus on Wisdom (Perception) checks. The devotee also gains Draconic as a bonus language.

Actions

Shortsword. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +5 to hit, reach 5ft., one target. *Hit:* 7 (1d6+3) slashing damage.

Shortbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack*: +5 to hit, range 100/400, one target. *Hit:* 6 (1d6+2) piercing damage.

Ten Legendary Magical Items

Arshin kept very busy making magic items, and a few are described below.

WEAPONS

Nothing was requested of Arshin more than weapons.

Dirgeblade

When the elven poet and singer Maethan Mar died, the forest he called home sang a sonorous song. The trees, animals, and undergrowth all joined to mark the passing of a legend. The strange song, resonating for hundreds of miles, burned itself into the memories of all who heard it. Arshin of Winewood was among those moved by the melody and set out to create a blade inspired by its notes.

Upon completion of his work, Arshin brought the blade to the elves of the forest who still mourned for Maethan. He presented the blade to them as a gift and demonstrated its unique property: the forest's song could be summoned from within the blade. When the elves heard the blade sing, they wept, collecting their tears in clay vessels. Arshin then reforged the sword and cooled it with the tears, adding the elves' sadness to the blade's power.

The *Dirgeblade* is an exquisitely crafted rapier set in a silver and leather scabbard. The blade glows a faint stormy blue and is encircled by swirling wisps of clouds.

DIRGEBLADE

Weapon (rapier), legendary
(requires attunement by a bard)

You gain a +3 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this magic weapon.

This weapon, when unsheathed, sheds dim blue light in a 20-ft. radius around you. When you hit a creature with it, you may use your bardic inspiration to impart a sense of overwhelming grief in the target. A creature affected by this grief must succeed on a DC 15 Wisdom saving throw or fall prone and become incapacitated by sadness until the end of its next turn. Once a month under an open sky, you can use a bonus action to speak this magic sword's command word, causing it to sing the "Dirge of Maethan Mar." This dirge conjures heavy rain (or snow in freezing temperatures) in the region for 2d6 hours. The precipitation falls in an X-mile radius around you, where X is equal to your level.

Ruby Crusher

The Peak Walkers lived on a mountain above a heavily populated valley for generations. In that time, their warriors repelled orc hordes, foreign armies, and all manner of beasts. They never demanded payment, despite the history of losses the clan experienced as the valley's unofficial protectors.

When word of the barbarians' battles against a force of invading stone giants reached the valley, the villages pooled their meager coin and commissioned a gift for Chieftain Yellow Wolf: a massive warclub made from small, cut rubies by the powerful enchanter Arshin of Winewood. Yellow Wolf invoked the magic of the club in a massive bonfire and led her warriors to victory against the giants. It is said the club struck with such force that the limbs of its victims flew off the mountain and rained on the valley below.

The *Ruby Crusher* is a greatclub made entirely of fused rubies with a grip wrapped in manticore hide. A roaring fire burns behind its smooth facets.

RUBY CRUSHER

Weapon (greatclub), legendary
(requires attunement by a creature with 16 or higher Strength)

You gain a +3 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this magic weapon.

You can use a bonus action to speak this greatclub's command word, causing it to be engulfed in flame, casting bright light in a 30-ft. radius and dim light for an additional 30 ft. While aflame, it deals fire damage. You may end this effect at any time. When you hit a creature of Large size or greater with this greatclub, the creature must succeed on a DC 16 Constitution saving throw or be knocked 30 ft. away from you. If the creature strikes an obstacle during this movement, it takes 1d6 bludgeoning damage for each 10 ft. traveled before hitting the obstacle.

ARMOR

Wherever weapons are valued, a need for armor arises.

Fountmail

The once great human city of Ollomar fell to darkness and ruin in the wake of a difficult war. The city was abandoned by the survivors—replaced by shadows that crept in from the nearby wastes. The communities around the city also shrank as the wicked things that called the city's ruins home sought to expand their terrible territory. The region tumbled into evil, and all good-natured creatures fled. Years passed, and no one ventured into that place.

Venika Harc, the young daughter of a noble house of Ollomar planned an expedition into the city. She knew it crawled with the unsettled spirits of slain citizens and the heartless ghouls from the nearby dusty plains. So the rich and brave Venika commissioned Arshin of Winewood to craft her a magical suit of armor to protect her from the cries and claws of the undead.

He made her a glittering suit of chainmail imbued with the restorative magic of a healing spring. Venika wore the Fountmail as she led her expedition into her lost homeland—though in the end, she and her men never returned.

The *Fountmail* is a dazzling white suit of chainmail with an alabaster-colored steel collar that covers part of the face.

FOUNTMAIL

Armor (chainmail), legendary
(requires attunement)

You gain a +3 bonus to AC while you wear this armor. Additionally, you gain the following benefits:

- You add your Strength and Wisdom modifiers in addition to your Constitution modifier on all rolls when spending HD to recover hit points.
- You have immunity to the frightened condition.
- You have resistance to necrotic damage.

The Smoking Plate of Heithmir

Heithmir the Red built a stronghold in a frozen hell where a howling wind carried the mad gibbering of the damned. Its stone walls, doubly thick, served his champions well as they waged war against a frigid evil. A magical doorway whose limits bridged the infernal world and his own sat in the heart of the stronghold.

Heated by magical fire, Heithmir's armor protected him from the deadly cold of his enemy's domain. A fierce dwarf visage, its beard made from rising smoke, was carved in relief on the pauldrons. This smoldering plate was crafted by none other than Arshin of Winewood.

It is said that Arshin learned much of elemental magic in the frozen planes of Hell assisting Heithmir during the dwarf warlord's campaign. Though Heithmir's fortress fell in the end, the dwarves, aided by the great enchanter, dealt heavy blows to the armies of Hell. The armor and its bearer disappeared in the final battle, and the Smoking Plate was not seen again.

The *Smoking Plate of Heithmir* is a suit of soot-colored plate armor with grim dwarf visages on the pauldrons. The pauldrons emit curling smoke and are hot to touch.

SMOKING PLATE OF HEITHMIR

Armor (platemail), legendary (requires attunement)

You gain a +3 bonus to AC and are resistant to cold damage while wearing this armor.

Additionally, when you are struck by an attack, you may use your reaction to fill a 20-ft. cone in front of you with heavy smoke. In addition to the normal penalties applied from being in a heavily obscured area, creatures that start or end their turn in the smoke must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned for 1d4 rounds. The cloud disperses after 2d4 minutes. A moderate wind (11–20 miles per hour) can also disperse the smoke after 1 minute, and a strong wind (21 or more miles per hour) can do so after 1 round. Once expended, this property of the armor cannot be used again until the next dawn.

WONDROUS ITEMS

It was wondrous items, though, whose creation Arshin found most fulfilling.

Arshin's Buckle of Blasting

The famous halfling bard Nels Lowhill was well known for his obscene limericks and bawdy songs featuring the relatives of elected officials, bureaucrats, tyrants, and priests. He was well-loved by common folk and roundly despised by most institutions and nobilities.

Nels often found himself in prison cells or dungeons because of his commentary and required a surefire means of escape. He turned to Arshin of Winewood for a solution. The enchanter set to work on a magical belt buckle that could detonate in a focused wave, shattering restraints and bending bars.

The *Buckle of Blasting* is a soot-colored steel buckle with an exploding flame etched into its surface. It can be affixed to any common belt.

BUCKLE OF BLASTING

Wondrous item (belt), legendary (requires attunement)

While wearing this belt, you gain resistance to force damage. In addition, the buckle has 5 charges and it regains 1d3 charges daily at dusk. As an action, you may spend 1 or 2 charges to cause one of the following effects:

Illuminate (1 charge). The buckle sheds warm, bright light in a 10-ft. radius and dim light for an additional 10 ft. centered on you. The light lasts for 1 hour, though you may extinguish it at any time.

Blast (2 charges). Each creature in a 20-ft. cone in front of you must make a DC 15 Dexterity saving throw. On a failed save, a creature takes 4d6 force damage and is pushed 10 ft. away from you, taking 1d6 bludgeoning damage if it strikes a solid object. On a successful save, a creature takes half damage and is not pushed. The blast deals triple damage to objects and structures and ignores damage thresholds of 10 or lower.

Flask of Epiphanies

It is no secret that Arshin of Winewood enjoyed his drink. The enchanter kept a large cellar of wines, spirits, and kegs of ale. He had custom racks made for the strange and exotic bottles gathered on his wanderings across the planes.

Arshin crafted several magical flasks in which he stored some of the rare and exotic spirits from his collection. After selling and gifting several enchanted flasks, Arshin discovered that the alcohol and the magic sometimes interacted in surprising ways. One such flask caused him to spend an evening lost in the Winewood, blinded by magical epiphanies.

The *Flask of Epiphanies* is a silver and cherry wood flask with finely cut garnets on its faces.

FLASK OF EPIPHANIES

Wondrous item, legendary (requires attunement)

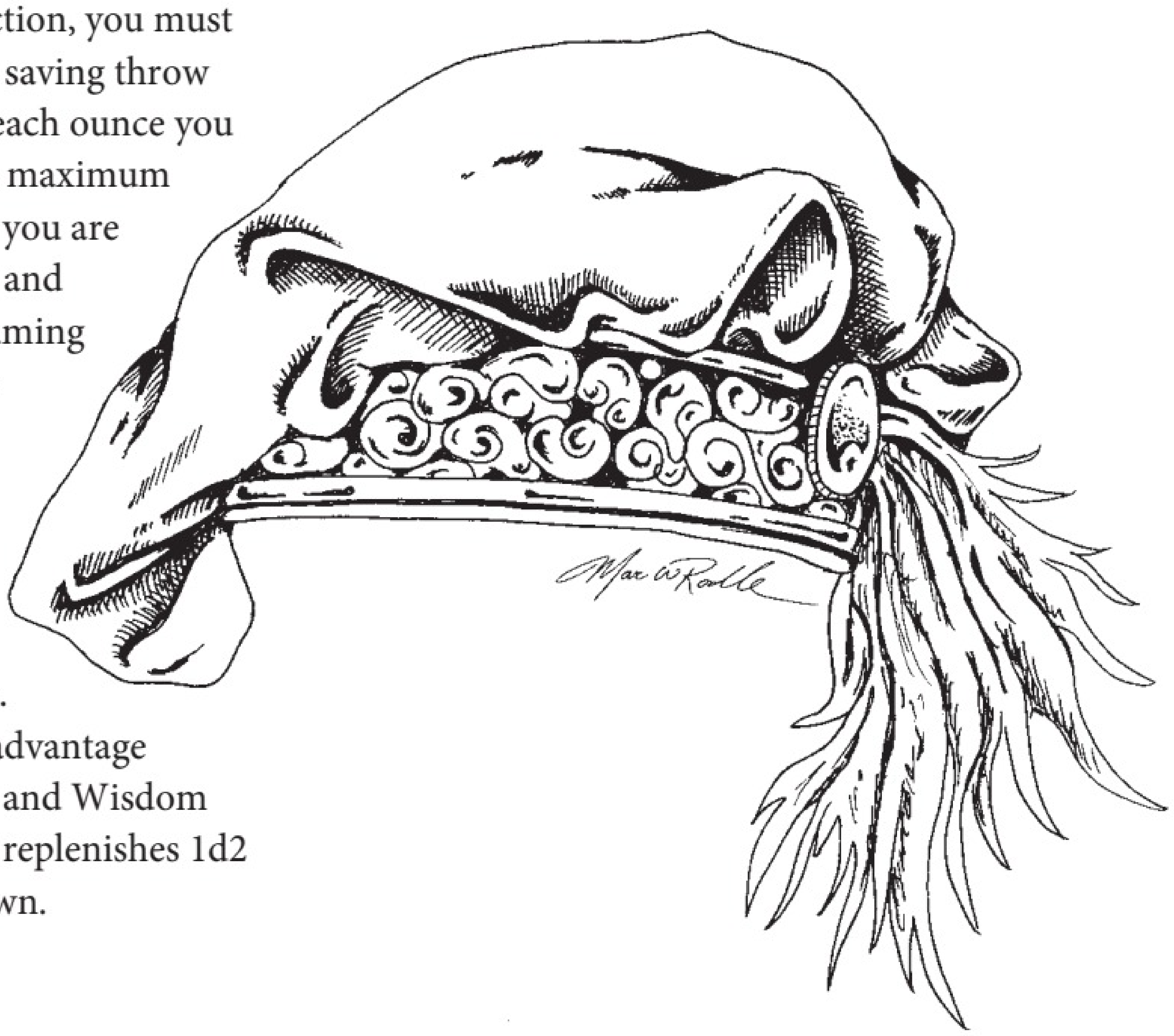
This ornate flask contains 5 ounces of powerful alcoholic spirits. As an action, you can drink up to 5 ounces of the flask's contents. You can drink 1 ounce without risk of intoxication. When you drink more than 1 ounce of the spirits in 1 action, you must make a DC 12 Constitution saving throw (this DC increases by 1 for each ounce you imbibe after the second to a maximum of DC 15). On a failed save, you are incapacitated for 1d4 hours and gain no benefits from consuming the alcohol. For each ounce consumed, you gain 1 Intelligence or 1 Wisdom (your choice). You lose 1 Dexterity for each ability point gained this way. The effect lasts for one hour. During this time, you gain advantage on all Intelligence (Arcana) and Wisdom (Religion) checks. The flask replenishes 1d2 ounces of spirits daily at dawn.

The Grasping Cap

The Sorcerers of Foull were nearly wiped out by their feud with a vicious mercenary company known as the Tossed Flail. The mercenaries excelled at luring the sorcerers into challenging tactical positions where the grinning wardogs pinned their magic-wielding nemeses with crossbow bolts. The leader of the sorcerers, Lonius Foull, was as mean as he was cunning. However, his temper led him and his followers through a series of rash decisions as he refused to let the Tossed Flail's taunts go unanswered.

With morale falling faster than his minions, the master sorcerer turned to Arshin of Winewood to devise some object that might protect the sorcerers from the Tossed Flail's crossbows without hindering their spellcasting. Arshin was nearly roasted alive when he jokingly suggested Lonius try "restraint" but ceased his jokes after Lonius offered him a large sum of gold to solve the problem.

Arshin experimented with all kinds of clothing but in the end settled on a simple hat. The unassuming cap left Lonius skeptical.



Standing by the strength of his craft, Arshin agreed to fight the Tossed Flail alongside the Sorcerers of Foull. The cap proved its worth tenfold when it caught dozens of bolts and illuminated the attackers for the sorcerers to easily dispatch. Lonius accepted the cap after the first battle and, with it, prevented the destruction of his band of sorcerers.

The *Grasping Cap* is a simple blue silk hat with a goose feather trim.

GRASPING CAP

Wondrous item (cap), legendary (requires attunement)

While wearing this cap, you gain advantage on Strength (Athletics) checks you make to climb, and the cap deflects the first ranged attack or ranged spell attack made against you each round. Additionally, the attacking creature sheds dim red-hued light in a 50-ft. radius until the end of its next turn. Attacks made against the illuminated creature have advantage.

Moonfield Lens

Untin and Yeoma were lovers. They lived in different villages, separated by a great open plain known as the Moonfields. One night during the bi-annual meeting of the two villages, the young men stole away to be alone in the old ruins in the sandy region of the fields. Yeoma wanted to show Untin an intact, underground chamber he had discovered that was filled with colored lenses of all shapes and sizes. As the pair traversed the precarious passages into the undamaged chamber, Untin set off an ancient trap, collapsing the hall behind them and sealing them in the ruins.

Above, their families scoured the ruins, knowing Yeoma frequented the place, but failed to find them. The grieving families returned to their villages and sent for Arshin, whose scrying skills were second only to his enchanting. He managed to locate Yeoma and Untin and a large excavation took place to free them. Arshin made each young man an enchanted lens from the recovered treasures in the ruins.

The lenses are rainbow-hued and protected by a leather case.

MOONFIELD LENS

Wondrous item, legendary (requires attunement)

This lens has 4 charges and it regains 1d3 expended charges daily at dawn. As an action, you can hold the lens to your eye, speak its command word and expend 2 charges to cause one of the following effects:

- ***Find Loved One (2 charges).*** You know the precise location of one creature you love (platonic, familial, or romantic). This knowledge extends into other planes.
- ***True Path (2 charges).*** For 1 hour, you automatically succeed on all Wisdom (Survival) checks to navigate in the wild. If you are underground, you automatically know the most direct route to reach the surface.

Scorpion Feet

In the far South, a great desert birthed a divine queen, Joisi of Sothe, who united the wandering tribes in the Hall of Blue Scarabs and grew Lake Tuo from a weedy oasis. She drove the Ancient Crawler into the sea and built spires of brilliant sandstone that shone like the sun. Her descendants ruled the desert for hundreds of years, and its people knew prosperity, light, and knowledge to rival the greatest empires of history. What brought the dynasty to an end is not known, but the magic, people, and stories of the Hall of Blue Scarabs were all but lost.

Arshin of Winewood once led an expedition into the black sands of Morneed, where the tombs of the forgotten queens lay waiting, in search of the legendary blue scarab carapaces from Queen Joisi's famed hall. For each brave soul who joined him, Arshin made a magical pair of sandals—*Scorpion Feet*, he called them. Arshin spoke little of his time in that desert, but before his death, he was often seen speaking quietly to a small scarab figurine.

The *Scorpion Feet* are thick-soled, leather sandals coated in magical wax. They can form to any humanoid foot.

SCORPION FEET

Wondrous item (sandals), legendary (requires attunement)

These leather sandals offer comfortable and safe passage across shifting sands. While you wear them, you gain the following benefits:

- You ignore difficult terrain created by sand.
- You gain advantage on all ability checks against natural hazards where sand is a threatening element.
- You gain resistance to poison damage and advantage on saving throws against being poisoned.
- Your steps made in sandy terrain do not leave tracks.

MISCELLANEOUS

Many of Arshin's creations grew from a specific need.

Arshin's Interplanar Paint

The Winewood houses a variety of hidden doors: mundane, magical, and a few that are something a little more. In the deep woods, doors are painted onto the rocky faces of sheltered outcroppings—doors to places beyond the trees.

Arshin's Interplanar Paint is a black, tarry substance that can be brushed onto a flat surface. A pot contains enough paint to create one doorway.

INTERPLANAR PAINT

Potion, legendary

This tarry unguent can be used to paint a single black doorway. While painting, you must concentrate on a plane of existence other than the one you currently occupy. If you are not interrupted, the doorway can be painted in 5 minutes. Once completed, the painting opens a two-way portal to the plane you imagined. The doorway is mirrored on the other plane, often appearing on a rocky face or the wall of a building. The doorway lasts for 1 week or until 5 gallons of silvered water (2,000 gp worth of silver) is applied to one side of the door.

ARTIFACT

And then there are those items—artifacts—that would keep Arshin cloistered away for many months at a time.

Arshin's Calipers

Forged by secret smiths in the Erngard Mountains and coated with pure diamond dust, these magical calipers were one of Arshin's primary enchanting tools. Equally able to measure the quality of magic and the convictions of a sentient being, the calipers were used to imbue countless objects with focused magic. The great enchanter carried the calipers on his person at all times and was even rumored to have bathed with them hanging from a thick platinum and adamantium chain around his waist.

Upon his death, the calipers were taken and hidden by his most devout Keepers, who buried them deep in the caves beneath the Winewood. There, they are guarded by fearsome beasts, bound to the task of protecting the powerful calipers, for if they fell into the wrong hands, the world would be altered forever.

Arshin's Calipers are a small measuring tool made from silver and steel and coated with diamond dust.

ARSHIN'S CALIPERS

Wondrous item (tool), artifact (requires attunement by a creature with the ability to prepare and cast non-cantrip arcane spells)

Brilliance. Your Intelligence score become 20 unless it is already 20 or higher.

Secrets of the Arcane. You gain advantage on all Intelligence (Arcana) checks. Additionally, you can sense the presence of magic within 30 feet of you. This functions like *detect magic*.

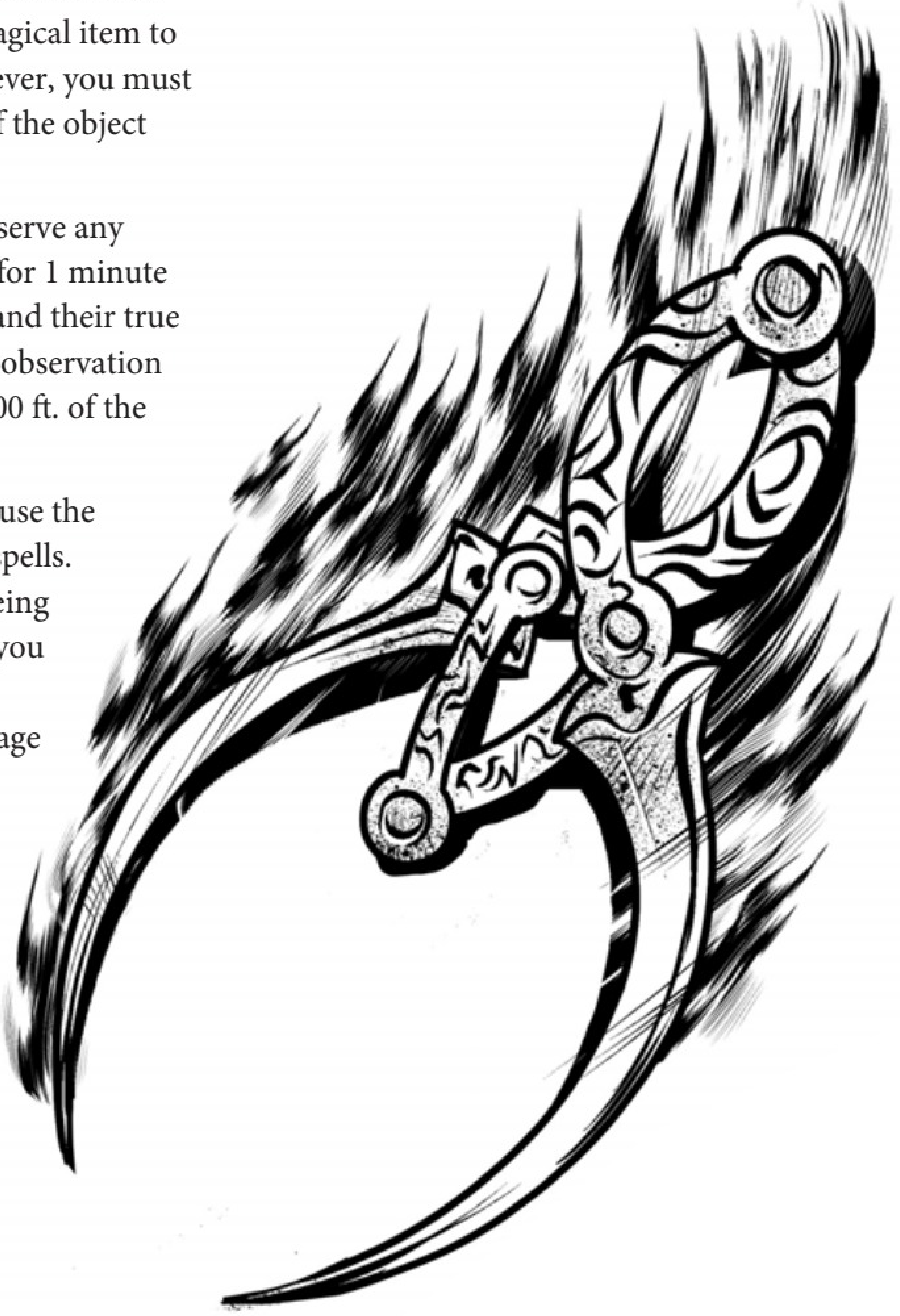
Measure Magic. You may examine any magical item or object for one minute to fully apprehend its magical abilities, powers, and nature. When using the calipers in this way, you do not need to attune yourself to a magical item to learn its properties; however, you must take a physical reading of the object with the calipers.

Measure Soul. You may observe any creature, uninterrupted, for 1 minute to learn their alignment and their true feelings toward you. The observation must take place within 100 ft. of the creature.

Arshin Weaving. You may use the calipers to affect nearby spells. As a reaction to a spell being cast within 60 ft. of you, you may choose to have that spell's caster gain advantage or disadvantage if the spell requires an attack roll. As a reaction to a creature making a saving throw against a spell being cast within 60 ft. of you, you may choose to have that saving throw made with advantage or disadvantage.

Static. The calipers emit a low level of magical static that may, over time, affect your spells. When preparing spells for the day, you must succeed on a DC 10 Intelligence saving throw or have 1d4 of your prepared spells switched with other spells you know. The switched spells are chosen randomly or by the GM. Each time you succeed on this saving throw, the DC increases by 2 the next time you prepare spells. Failing the saving throw resets the save DC to 10.

Destroying the Calipers. The only way to destroy *Arshin's Calipers* is to bathe them in the blood of a freshly slain, 200-year-old beholder's central eye.



THE DELIGHTS OF ENKADA PISHTUHK

by Troy E. Taylor with Ben McFarland

Finding the archmage Enkada Pishtuhk is not the difficult part. Discovering his peculiar desires, however, is fraught with danger and mystery.

Adventurers often make their first inquiry at key locations throughout Midgard, say at a market stall behind the red door in Bemmea, deep within a vault of the Great Library of Friula, or at an open-air booth during Zobeck's midsummer fair.

"We seek a powerful boon. How can I appease the wizard, Enkada Pishtuhk, the one they call Treachery's Rider?"

Sometimes the adventurer uses the word "*impress*," sometimes it's "*bargain with*," "*coerce*," or "*ingratiate*." The question varies, but the reaction is nearly always the same.

The person, be it merchant, sage, or mystic, shudders and winces, squeezing his or her eyes shut at the utterance of the mage's name. They glance furtively aside or tentatively down at their feet, not daring to breathe. Just when they think it's safe to exhale a sigh of relief, they see it, just out of the corner of their eye. The shadow of the mage! Clawed hands rise menacingly from the ethereal form and yellowed eyes dart about, fixed on the identity of the speaker.

"*Appease my master*?" says the shadow in a voice deep like an underground river and smooth like bourbon. "*You must satisfy one of his appetites. They are well-known to folk like this one who barter in information. Then, my master Pishtuhk might entreat with you. Come to Pah'draguushlai in the Wasted West. But don't come empty handed. And mind your manners.*"

The shadow evaporates with a menacing laugh.

An Appetite for the Exotic

Enkada Pishtuhk's tastes in food and fashion are unusual. Offering such is one of the few ways aspiring adventurers might be permitted within the archmage's presence. Here are a few.

Jellied Eyeballs of Bemmea: Fishing boats venturing into the vast Western Ocean often return to Bemmea with tuna whose eyeballs are boiled for the discerning diner. The wizard always accepts tuna eyeballs, but he prefers those of goblin sharks (see *Midgard Bestiary*) instead. The aquatic shark-shaped goblins hunt among the ruins of the sunken Arcane Armada in the shallows off Bemmea. Taking the eyeballs while they are in shark form is best.

To truly tempt Enkada, adventurers might gift him with a lesser wizard's oculo swarm (see *Tome of Beasts*). Bemmean wizards employ these creatures as truth detectors during intense negotiations. Enkada, however, relishes the thought of depriving another, lesser wizard of their eyeball servants, especially when it is served on a platter with noodles.

Scented Cones of the Southlands: It is the fashion of high-born lords and ladies of Nuria Natal in the Southlands to adorn themselves with scented cones of wax or resin—as they melt in the tropical clime, they emit a pleasing fragrance. As both wizard and alchemist, the making of scented cones is no secret to Enkada.

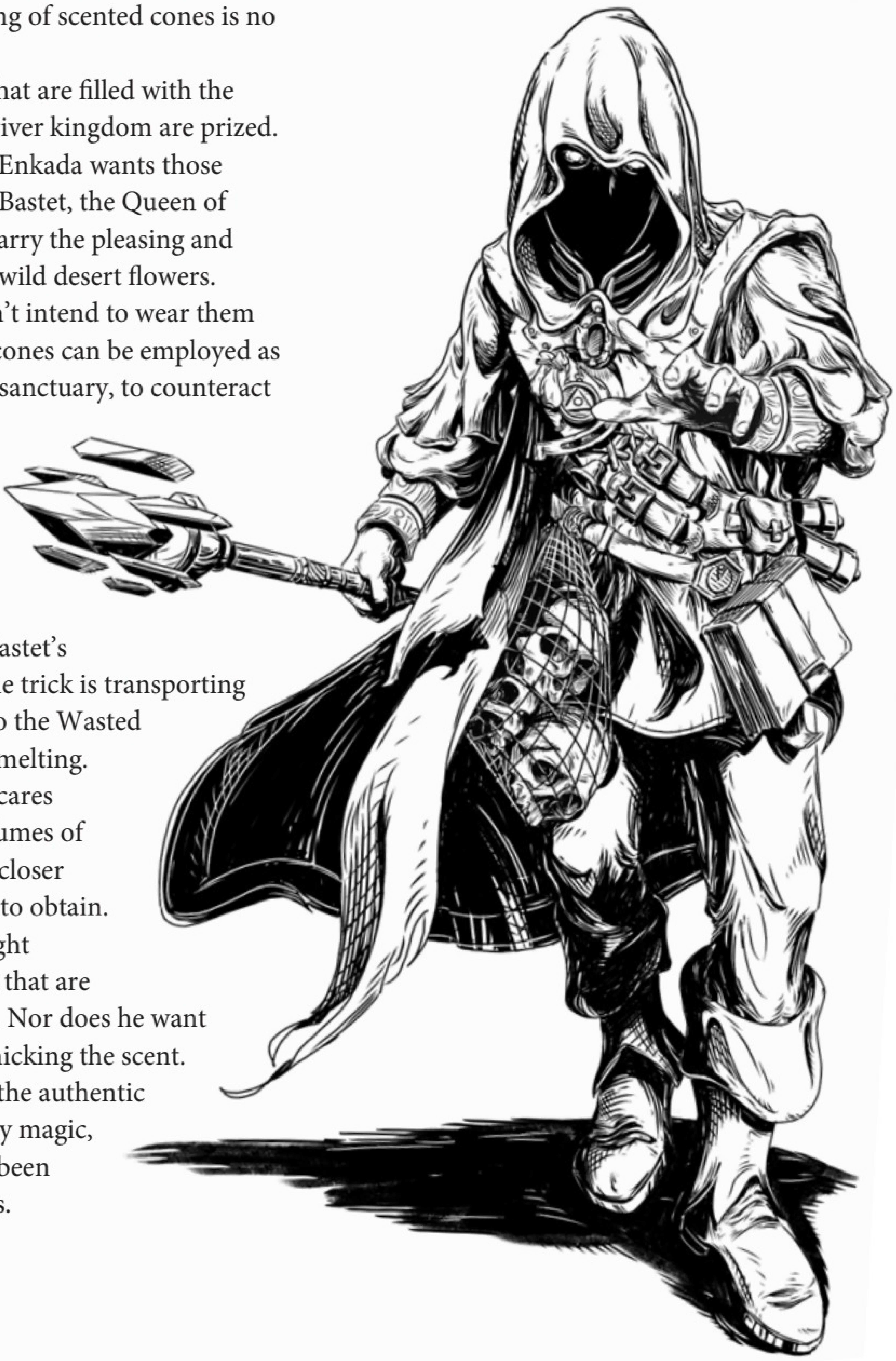
But having cones that are filled with the heady scents of the river kingdom are prized. Most of all, though, Enkada wants those crafted by priests of Bastet, the Queen of Perfumes, for they carry the pleasing and unique fragrance of wild desert flowers. While Enkada doesn't intend to wear them as a deodorant, the cones can be employed as air fresheners in his sanctuary, to counteract the ancient and otherworldly mold-like stench of the Walker.

The cones can be obtained from any market in Per-Bastet's Perfume District. The trick is transporting them all the way into the Wasted West without them melting.

Strangely, Enkada cares nothing for the perfumes of Bourgund, which is closer and would be easier to obtain. In fact, he will outright refuse any perfumes that are manufactured there. Nor does he want a magical effect mimicking the scent. The wizard believes the authentic cones superior to any magic, and thus far, he has been able to spot forgeries.

Triolo's Twin Offerings: Enkada's links to the shore city of Triolo are shrouded in a shadowy past, but there is no denying his affection for two of its particular attractions.

In the Quays district, they proudly proclaim they don't keep goats nor do they make goat cheese, like their rivals in Savoyne. Rather, they take Savoyne cheese and make it better.



The cheese is imported from Gold Coast ports or from merchant trains that cross the highlands that bisect the peninsula. The process is not for the fainthearted, however. The cheese is laid out so that flies will lay their eggs upon it. In time, those maggots will make it their home, secreting fats and oils and fermenting the cheese until it gains its distinctive flavor.

And from the Spider's Shrine of Archae are "fate scarves" woven of the finest spider's silk. These items, embroidered with the words of a foretelling are made especially for Enkada as if there were a spiritual connection between the priestess of the spinning goddess Ariadne and the renegade wizard. Strangely, the silk scarves will be bundled for transport when adventurers arrive as if they were expected.

Lorebooks of the Elves and the Elfmarked: For reasons unknown, Enkada is ravenous for lorebooks of history and magic concerning Elfheim, the Archon's Court, and the lands governed by the Grand Duchy of Dornig. He also is fascinated by songbooks, the few that exist, from the elfmarked lands. Not surprisingly, the inward-looking inhabitants of Dornig follow the imperatrix's example and jealously guard such repositories of knowledge and are loathe to see them leave the duchy. Any such items smuggled out are viewed by Enkada with a deep appreciation.

He has no qualms about copies made in his presence by those willing to risk staying in a remote, isolated cavern scriptorium hidden deep in the Wastes. Such supplicants are responsible for their own food and drink while copying the texts and must submit to magical geas ensuring their true and accurate transcription. They are also responsible for returning the originals, which may carry its own risks. He prefers to keep the originals as they occasionally contain hidden messages or elements.

Honey Mead of Bjeornshafen: Enkada rarely partakes in strong drink, but he finds the honey mead of the Bear Kingdom agreeable to his palate. Though many trade routes lead to the city ruled by the werebear druid Yohana Honeyhair, the journey across the North Sea can be treacherous and time-consuming. Despite its reputation as an excellent portage ale, keeping the mead from spoiling during a journey across the Wastes still requires some inventiveness on the part of the adventurers as it is quite sensitive to heat and extraplanar storage gives it a spoiled flavor. Adventurers will know if Enkada finds the gift to his liking should he offer a round to all in attendance.

House Kot: Enkada would not be satisfied with a simple house cat as a pet. But getting a kot bayun would fulfill many longstanding desires beyond companionship. Obtaining a kot bayun from the Arbonesse or Tomierran forests well-versed in elven folk poems and fey-inspired epics would exceed even Enkada's expectations, perhaps aiding his research into elf lore. In this case, he might even express a feeling of indebtedness to the aspiring adventurers. Enkada's inscrutable nature rivals even Baba Yaga and makes it difficult to know whether his sincerity is genuine, though.

The Boons of Enkada Pishtuhk

Adventurers have sought out Enkada—he has lived for several centuries—for both information and powerful magic items. Even if most of his time upon Midgard has been spent as a pariah in the aftermath of the Great Mage Wars, there is no denying his intelligence, arcane power, and command of ancient lore.

Only a few items are actually kept in Enkada's sanctuary. Most are stored in caches across the Wasted West. Even obtaining them with Enkada's blessing might entail some risk as he seldom remembers to mention where he placed particular wards, traps, and monstrous guardians to protect the items.

For those seeking particular answers, locations, or other intangible benefits, Enkada often provides very precise answers, which leave out details or answer the very letter of the question. This can be frustrating, but he is willing to entertain multiple questions if the gift is sufficient and often allows a single exception to a particularly polite solicitor.

1 Poison: Midnight Tears
2 Poison: Wyvern
3 Poison: Purple worm
4 Periapt of Health
5 Portable Hole
6 Arrow of Slaying
7 Wand of Web
8 Wand of Wonder
9 Cloak of Arachnida
10 Gloves of Missile Snaring
11 Ring of Free Action
12 Slippers of Spider Climbing
13 Shield of Missile Attraction
14 Decanter of endless water
15 Scroll of Guards and Wards
16 Scroll of Web
17 Rod of Alertness
18 Periapt of Proof against Poison
19 Figurine of Wondrous Power (Marble Elephant)
20 Staff of the Magi

Sanctuary of Expectations

Few know the true form of Enkada's sanctuary that hangs from the Walker, save for the most powerful wizards capable of piercing the veil of his illusions.

Despite his intimidating magical shadow and his reputation for treachery, the part of his personality that demands proper etiquette requires him to prepare his sanctuary for visitors. That means crafting an appearance that matches their expectations or at least satisfies his obligation as host to offer a space visually pleasing and welcoming.

Adventurers variously describe the cozy cluttered laboratory one might expect of an archmage, a starkly clean (antiseptic even) room of white with sharp lines, a hammock constructed of spidery webbing stretching out in all directions from a central throne in the center, a library of shelves stuffed full of books extending out beyond the range of vision and far larger on the inside than it could possibly be, to even a rickety treehouse of a structure of thin slatted boards adorned with luxury items from across Midgard that creaks, sags, and shifts in the winds of the waste.

Through the veil of illusion there might be hints, however, to the distasteful, even ominous, aspects of the actual surroundings. Is that curtain cord a webbing strand of some aspect of Pah'draguushlai? Is that soft cushion somehow pulsing and throbbing as if it were alive? Are those sparkling, magical motes actually a swarm of red-banded line spiders skittering across the room (see *Tome of Beasts*)? That frigid yet invisible caress that brought about a deep sense of mindbending unease—was it a figment of your imagination or were the tendrils of a voidling hovering hungrily nearby (see *Tome of Beasts*)?

Regardless, meeting Enkada comes with its own share of anxieties and nervous moments. Yet as a stickler for good manners, his diction is perfect and his own actions impeccable.

"*Now, what can I tempt you with, my good friends? Wine? Tea? Perhaps a nice cup of cool crystal water from this decanter? Be at ease . . .*"

He pauses and offers a half-smile, a knowing expression with a hint of menace behind it.

"*And tell me what brings you to my sanctuary in the waste.*"

BLOOD MAGES OF KAA'NESH

by Wolfgang Baur

Blood magic is widespread in Midgard and quite difficult to root out once its adherents gain positions of power. All those who oppose them tend to die of hideous diseases or swift-acting poisons. Of the many cults that use blood magic, the best known might be the followers of the Sanguine Path, and among wizards, many follow in the vile footsteps of Taergash the Bloodpurger.

However, two places in Midgard always spring to mind when blood magic is discussed: the vampire-ruled lands of Morgau and the ogre stronghold of Kaa'nesh on the Ruby Sea (a holding of the Mharoti Empire that provides the dragon folk with dependably strong and dependably stupid ogres for its armies). Their Red Hand ogres make excellent shock troops—and their tactical sense and arcane power are quite sharp, directed by the Scarlet Heirophant Galusid and the members of the alliance of blood mages of Kaa'nesh called the Hunter's Chosen.

The Hunter and Blood Magic

The origins of Kaa'nesh are thought to date to a time when the Ebon Flame of Beldestan burned bright, before the rise of Mharot's children to their great empire. It may have been a colony of Beldestani merchants, providing a port to the west connected to Reth-Sal and to the elf city of Sephaya and its surrounding fragrant gardens. It was long an independent city on the Ruby Sea, home to ogres, gnolls, and human slaves and devoted to the praise of the Hunter, the blood goddess Marena, V'ashra the Tormentor, and similar dark gods.

While many cults use blood magic, the city makes a public display of its allegiance to these powers with daily offerings of fine oxen and cattle and monthly displays of human, goblin, and gnoll sacrifices, overseen by one or another of the blood mages. The hunt and the kill are present in most of the sacrifices in abbreviated form with the animal briefly "chased" by a priest and a humanoid victim freed from their bonds for a moment, the better to please the Hunter and fulfill his mission of winnowing out the weakest and strengthening the strong.

Variant: Red Hand Ogres (+1 CR)

Ogres of Kaa'nesh are often tattooed in red swirling patterns, enchanted with what the ogres call the Red Hands. When they strike a foe with a melee attack, they gain hit points equal to half the damage they cause as they drain strength from their foes. A creature struck by a Red Hand ogre cannot be magically healed until after a short rest.

Galusid, the Scarlet Heirophant

The Scarlet Heirophant Galusid (LE male human wizard [blood mage] 12) is the arcane and spiritual leader of the blood mages of Kaa'nesh, and he commands complete loyalty and obedience from the city's inhabitants. Physically, he is not deeply imposing: Galusid is a short man of about 40 years with tattooed forearms and a quick way with a knife or wand. Black hair and sharp eyes, his somewhat bulging potbelly belies speed and a high degree of toughness and cruelty.

In arcane terms, Galusid is a terror, for he commands the Hunter's Company, a group of 50 blood mages. This thoroughly blood-soaked company of humans, gnolls, and goblins, with a handful of kobolds, constantly enhances their magic by drawing poison and disease from the blood of victims and spreading it to others. All members of the Company are sworn to serve Mharot and the timarli of Kalpostan directly, rather than the Dread Sultan in distant Kalpostan. They often go raiding on the Rothenian Plain for centaurs to drag as sacrifices to the Hunter's altar.

BEMMEA'S SCHEMING ARCANISTS

by Troy E. Taylor

> *I've watched Gispara Ravensbark cast spells on several occasions, and I've never ceased to be amazed. The ancient gnome is almost nonchalant as she assumes a well-practiced stance, platinum ankh gently cradled in her left hand, her arm swinging loosely at her side.*
>
> *There's a devilish twinkle in her eyes as she begins the incantation. The fingers of her free hand are a blur of motion, precision befitting a maestro. Then comes the somatic component: her utterances of ancient Elvish violating more than a hundred magocratic ordinances.*
>
> *But as with all spellcasting in Bemmea, mastery of the art is its own loophole.*
>
> —Hortensia Athon

Most archmages contemplate the machinations of old rivals and take elaborate measures as a precaution against them. Wizards of the middle ranks contend with peers whose meddling undermines ambition's aims.

Even as they keenly watch for rivals' schemes, most arcanists are laying out their own plans. Like puppeteers who never reveal how they string a marionette, the real satisfaction comes from how one masks the connecting lines, maintaining the illusion that an adversary is dancing of their own accord.

Bemmea is a cauldron of intrigue. It is a city of secrets and secret societies, of fraternities and guilds, of institutions of learning, and of apprenticeships with their own allegiances and vows.

There are plots and plotters aplenty.

Here then is a listing of some of the capital city's most masterful mages, who are as often the pawns as they are the architects of some grand design.

Gelasien Kuskoom

Gelasien loves a room with a view. She's not powerful enough to yet obtain a living space in the famed Kallimachus Spire, but she does have an apartment in the spire's adjoining northwest support tower, connected by a skybridge.

The apartment is stylish and fashionable. Gelasien patronizes the arts. Even if Bemmea's offerings pale in comparison to the high realism of the Seven Cities' masters in sculpture and painting, they do reflect the city's fascination with the fantastic: abstract representations of the elements make for a stunning mural.

If Gelasien continues to hone her skill, the Barsella-born illusionist might even attain a spot in the city's most illustrious property, the ocean-front High Spires. Oh, to dream.

For someone who defines success by elevation, her ascended path is grounded in the trenches. By proxy and by favor, she has the allegiance of more than a dozen Feywarden officers. Many who patrol the Arbonesse border around Tintager depend on her patronage, which in the currency of Allain, compounding the influence she commands in Bemmea.

Gelasien's "interest" in the Feywardens has not gone unnoticed. Malcot Ebonstaff and Feywarden Cothwidden have both called on her to assess her motivations and intentions. Both left her presence convinced the auburn-haired woman with a dusky complexion was a true patriot of Allain. They came warded against her enchantments, but they saw what she wished them to see.

She knows she may have to demonstrate her "patriotism" soon. Mages more powerful than that pair will be watching her carefully. Sometimes, the most powerful illusion is to undertake an action without magic.

Friends and Rivals: As a patron of the arts, Gelasien is enraptured with Imalian Jaskvitze's style of storytelling. Imalian is not privy to Gelasien's true designs on power, which is just as well for both, given their predilections. Gelasien has already picked a target to prove her trustworthiness. Prentervuul Ulst entrusted her with knowledge of his illicit activities. But she is willing to betray him.

Signature Spells: *dark dementing* (MHH), *hallucinatory terrain, hypnotic pattern.*

Glerung Ulberhast

Broad-shouldered and dressed in woodland greens, Glerung Ulberhast looks more like a forester than a conjurer. From the earliest age, he was taught to appreciate growing things, especially old trees with thick, course bark. Like him, they endure.

Glerung frequently takes contemplative walks among the cluster of trees in the small park that contains the Nefarious Fountain. Despite the park's size, it most closely resembles the sheltering boughs of his birthplace, the Old Margreve hamlet of Whistlehallow Village.

Unlike his Margreve kinfolk, Glerung no longer abides superstition. To him, magic is a formula as definitive as mathematics. As enchanting as old wives' tales and folk wisdom may sound, they can never be taken at face value. The hokum must be peeled away to get at the concrete truth beneath.

That is why Glerung has no romantic notions about elvish magic. It is a commodity to be acquired and used; no more dangerous than any other brand of magic. Of course, so long as the magocracy's authorities continue to use propaganda and laws to discourage (and in many cases, outright ban) the use or possession of anything elvish in origin, the appetite for it grows more ravenous.

Glerung feeds that appetite. He provides that which is forbidden, a lucrative and dangerous occupation. When he gets wind of an item "in the open" (as he describes elvish artifacts on the cusp of discovery), he assembles teams of adventurers to make forays across the border.

Glerung always sends two teams. The first is of trusted confidantes, mostly rogues, druids, and rangers who have more loyalty to a freshly minted coin than to the nine-star banner of Allain. This first team is fully aware Glerung will have other agents on the case.

The second is through an assumed identity, an approach that produces interesting results. Glerung poses as Adrastes Fochetto, the ascended chamberlain of the ninth level of the Order of the Sunrise Shadow. The society, which has a charter to study ley lines, is headquartered just west of the White Citadel. Robed in white with a brilliant gold stole, Fochetto cuts an imposing authoritative figure. Relying on the society's veil of secrecy, he assembles parties of inexperienced adventurers.

Friends and Rivals: As Fochetto, he depends on the tiefling wizard Lol'usoth Tashuz for information on potential buyers. The bard Imalian Jaskvitze is a constant thorn in Glerung's side; she has tried to horn in on many deals, always waiting until an artifact has been brought into the city before bringing the pressure of blackmail to get a cut.

Signature Spells: *black tentacles, shadow realm gateway* (MHH), *stinking cloud*.

Imalian Jaskvitze

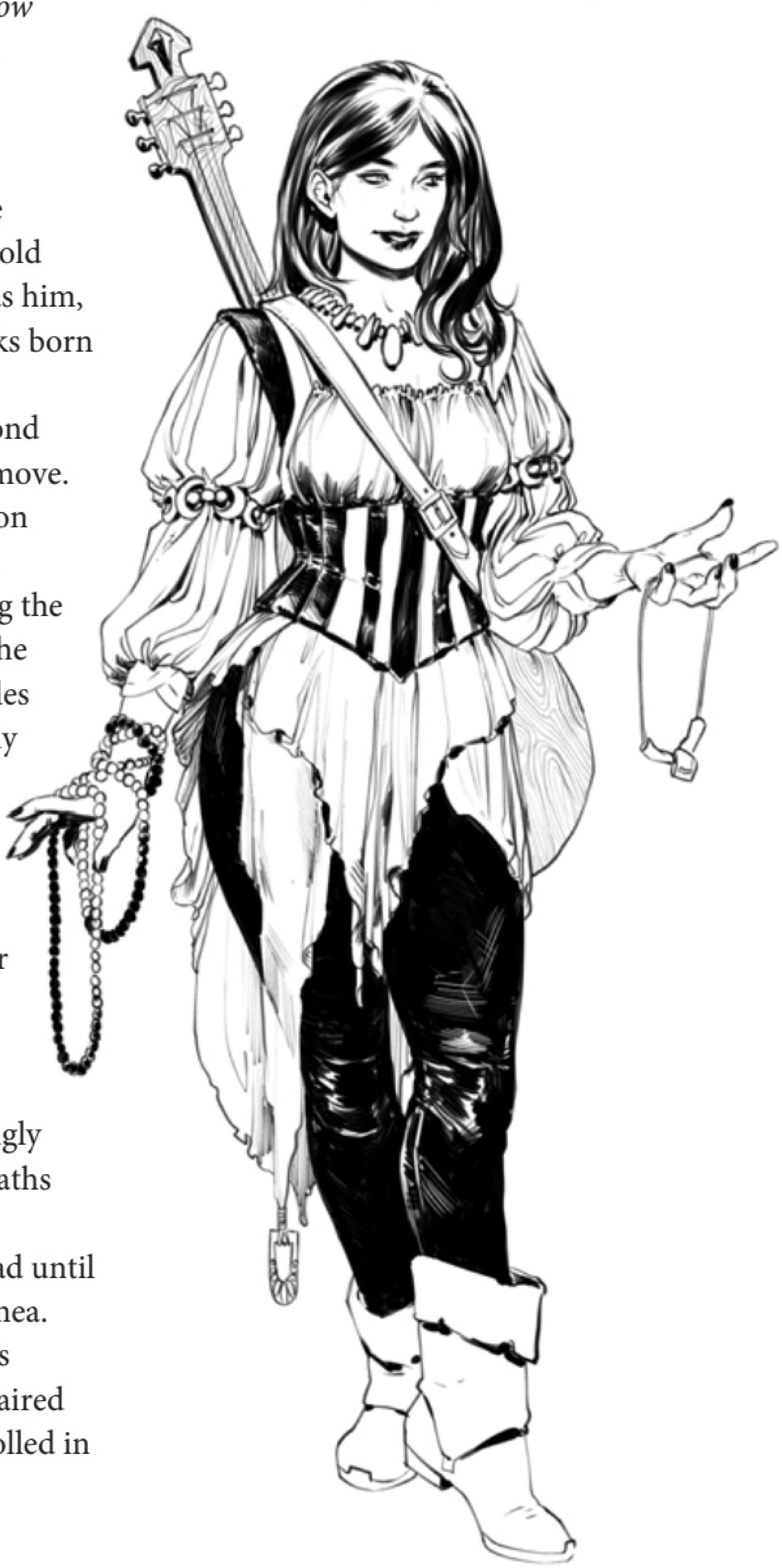
Imalian is a female human bard whose grandfather was a troubadour back in old Illyria. She has the same fine features as him, an alluring beauty shared by many folks born of the Winewood.

Her father, who had the same vagabond yearnings, was content to stay on the move. The family lived in a mule-drawn wagon that made a circuit of the Seven Cities. They performed in coaching inns along the way, were street-corner musicians in the larger cities, and played supporting roles for established theater companies. Only later did the Seven Cities' war with the Mharoti Empire force them from their homeland.

Her mother insisted they settle down, preferably in a place where their daughter might yet receive proper instruction as a spellcaster. They put their trust in their team's lead mule, Adagio, who guided them on a seemingly impossible trek. They braved rickety paths through the Pytonne Mountains and navigated the dangers of the Mage Road until at last Adagio clop-clopped into Bemmea.

The family opened a shop in the city's northeast quadrant that made and repaired musical instruments. Imalian was enrolled in the Academies Arcana.

Imalian performed in all of the city's finest inns and taverns. But the stage she considers her own is the Toppled Tower in the northwest quadrant. To her, there isn't a better spot. The open archways of the building's arcade serve as an amazing backdrop to her performance, the lightning blue of the Outermost Sea visible beyond. (Plus, local lore claims that the ley line called Leviathan's Road passes through the tavern; always a plus should push ever come to shove in a magical showdown.)



It took a long time for the family to gain acceptance. Imalian endured taunts, jeers, and accusations because of her elvish-sounding name and delicate appearance. The family eventually won over their neighbors with good cheer and delightful music.

Imalian hasn't always used a smile and a jest to see her way through. Magical charms and social leverage are in her repertoire; she gets what she wants with influence peddling and by playing off others' desires. She has yet to penetrate the tight social circle of Allain's most powerful mages, but she's angled closer and closer with every gambit.

Friends and Rivals: She was delighted when the illusionist Gelasien Kuskoom became her patron and her friend (without resorting to charms to be enamored of her). Her enchantments haven't endeared her to everyone. The calculating Glerung Ulberhast finds the practice distasteful, and he thinks many of her accolades are unwarranted. She thinks that Glerung is hiding many secrets.

Signature Spells: *compulsion, dominate person, fear*.

Lol'usoth Tashuz

Lol'usoth Tashuz desires revenge. The despair in the tiefling's heart is unquenchable, not unlike the arcane flames that ravage Bemmea's Smoldering Library.

Some say Lol'usoth is a sentimental fool. In Bemmea, where pursuit of magical mysteries is a paramount concern, one must learn to get beyond such losses. When the deceased is a spellcaster, one must prepare for such an outcome: eldritch manipulation is inherently dangerous.

In Lol'usoth's case, it was almost a foregone conclusion. Lol'usoth loved the demonmarked evoker Kasidra Entripee, a sorceress who loosed fire from her fingertips and whose eyes smoldered with passion for the next great adventure. She was a matchstick destined to burn out quickly.

There was naught but a pile of ash to say farewell to, no possessions left as keepsakes. Lol'usoth's plight is understandable; he has only memories of intimacy left to mourn.

A master evoker in his own right, Lol'usoth has dedicated himself to bringing Kasidra's killers to justice. He's traced his beloved's final steps from the Elves in Irons tavern to the Skull Bowl. He's questioned masters in the Academies Arcana to the point of rudeness. He's called on favors from the Guild of Honest Inkers and Sanctioned Sigilists. But the clues always circle back, the killers' tracks covered too cleverly, leaving him in a spiral of despair.

Desperate, he has begun reaching out to adventurers to help him find the truth. The real culprit had best pray for redemption because Lol'usoth's wrath will be unleashed in a torrent of elemental magic.

Friends and Rivals: Glerung Ulberhast relies on Lol'usoth's unerring desire for the truth to provide reliable information, an arrangement that has been mutually beneficial. The scribe Prentervuul Ulst has been a most steadfast friend, encouraging the tiefling's investigation even when others say it is hopeless. Prentervuul, though, has played Lol'usoth for false. Kasidra's singular thirst for adventure was too great an inner fire for a necromancer of Prentervuul's abilities to ignore. He arranged for her death. Then armed with a cold iron mask of demonic origin and incantations once cast by the lord of shadows and the goddess of the underworld, Prentervuul trapped Kasidra's soul and forged her into his own mask wight (see *Tome of Beasts*). Hidden in a vault beneath the Librarium Caelmarath, Kasidra is now an undead knight who will serve Prentervuul's bidding when his own plans come to fruition.

Signature Spells: *doom of the earthen maw* (MWB), *flameweave* (MHH), *wall of force, winter's radiance* (MHH).

Mulith Ashagol

For years, adventure took Mulith to ports around the Middle Sea. She served captains both honest and pirate. Dark haired, bright eyed, and with a complexion kissed by the sun, Mulith was seeking her destiny.

She found it on a journey up the River Nurai, just as her inner magic became manifest. A sorceress, she sought guidance at a temple devoted to Thoth-Hermes. After years of study, likeminded custodians initiated her into a secret society, the Emerald Order.

The order's leader, Dromdel Re, personally gave her a new task. Embedding her into a trade mission to Allain, she was instructed to steer society according to the tenets of the Emerald Tablet. Citing her personal devotion to Thoth-Hermes, Mulith was accorded honored accommodations within the silvered spire of Bemmea's Feathered Tower.

Mulith must navigate between twin obligations: keeping secret her affiliation to the Emerald Order while serving the trade interests of the River Kingdom's ruler, King Thutmoses XXIII. While the two interests are rarely in conflict, she must never risk exposure as belonging to the order without risking her appointment (and probably her life).

Mulith has an affinity for swashbucklers and sorcerers, so she prefers to recruit them for clandestine missions.

Friends and Rivals: Though their goals are often opposed, Mulith has come to respect and admire the straightforward methods of the conjurer Pandarus Kildare. Their encounters have been cordial even while they work to undermine each other's efforts. The necromancer Prentervuul Ulst is a more pressing concern; the Order believes he is meddling with powers beyond his ken.

Signature Spells: *banishment, flame strike, guardian of faith*.

Prentervuul Ulst

The shingle over Prentervuul's modest storefront shop reads, "Sage: Research 10 sp per Candle." The unassuming human native of Allain supplements his business by scribing for the Guild of Honest Inkers and Sanctioned Sigilists.

Prentervuul is known as a diligent researcher whose asking rate is far less than his true value. He has little free time, but there are a handful of mages in Bemmea who call him friend, who invite him into their homes and share meals.

In dark corners of the Red Door Market and the Librarium Caelmarath, however, there are rumors about the mage exchanged only as whispers. Certain servants of the Shroud Guildhouse know him by their dealings both illicit and forbidden. He is supplied with the instruments and chemicals reserved for the embalmer's craft. Necromancy is a forbidden art in the magocracy, but he thinks himself too clever to be caught.

Accusations of his involvement in the vile art surfaced in the past. But Prentervuul's reputation was vigorously defended with testimonials by guild scribes in good standing. Now, whenever a new crop of rumors surface, he dismisses them as old news already refuted, and the guild threatens the accuser with libel.

In fact, he is more nefarious than any suspect. The only thing that has held him back is a genuine apprenticeship. He is forging his own way in discovering the path to controlling the undead. His boldness has rewarded him with accomplishments that should be beyond his skill level. There have also been missteps that proper instruction would have helped him avoid.

He has designs on the Ninemage Council; perhaps even ruling himself. He hides his undead creations in secret places across the city, and when the time is right, he will unleash them.

Friends and Rivals: Any friendship he makes is a pretense, a means to gain access to something or someone that will advance his necromancy. The most gullible of his acquaintances is the tiefling Lol'usoth Tashuz. More than a few wise mages, including Pandarus Kildare, Mulith Ashagol, and Gelasien Kuskoom suspect him of necromancy but lack the evidence needed to act against him directly.

Signature Spells: *animate dead, bestow curse, blight, circle of death*.

The Lever, the Fulcrum, and the Screw

Three archmages who became disenchanted with how magic was being taught at the Academies Arcana made repeated attempts at reform over the years. Gispara Ravensbark, a female gnome now ranked as an archmage, and Pandarus Kildare, a male human conjurer of nearly equal status, have devoted a lifetime to developing new methods of instruction. Lufra Sly, a female human summoner, was part of the early effort but has since moved on. They met mostly headwinds despite earning accolades for their effort.

Decades ago, Gispara and Pandarus met in a chance meeting at the Grifyn and the Kimera. The latter lent a sympathetic ear to the gnome's theories. The pair shared an aptitude for conjuration magic (and a thirst for the tavern's signature label).

Because they explored the application of force in spells outside the evocation school as a primary tenet, intrigued onlookers took to calling the pair the Fulcrum and the Lever. Gispara was the "fulcrum," positing every new point. Pandarus, possessed of an analytical mind and willing to test every assertion, thus earned the name, the "lever."

The partnership drew the interest of a third: Sly, a wizard originally from the Republic of Valera. Sly earned her reputation as an iconoclast, having already been ejected from the Lodge of Three Moons after a dispute escalated, and she cast *void strike* against the grandmaster.

Gispara and Pandarus were interested in how their method could "push" or propel magic. But Sly, as a summoner, sought ways it could "pull." By helping them formalize this overlooked aspect, Sly was given the nickname, the Screw.

Friends and Rivals: The partnership dissolved as their respective lives took them different directions. Over the years, they sometimes came into conflict. Pandarus used the method in service of the magocracy. Sly became a pariah, using her magic to open the curtain between realities. Gispara sought a middle path and tried to master access to the shadow roads.

Signature Spells: Pandarus: *blizzard* (MHH), *caustic torrent* (MHH), and *ley surge* (MHH); Sly: *glimpse of the void* (MWB), *last stars of the dying sun* (MHH), and *void rift* (MWB); Gispara: *greater ley pulse* (MHH), *open red portal* (MWB), and *seal red portal* (MWB).

Abbreviations: MWB, *Midgard Worldbook*; MHH, *Midgard Heroes Handbook*

GISPARA'S REFORMS

Gispara's longtime critic Hortensia Athon, a mage of the Affiliation of Unaffiliated Wizards, is one of the most outspoken critics of Gispara's reforms.

And to be clear, Athon finds fault with the approach itself. Of Gispara, she has only admiration.

Athon acknowledges that Gispara's application of evocation magic can "put more rum in the punch bowl."

But, she says, the result of such an approach is to cast spells that are brittle and prone to shatter. "They are swinging pots and pans of cast iron when they could be wielding a hammer or mace made of wrought iron," Athon says. "Both pack a wallop when they hit home, but eventually, that frying pan will crack and split in two."

Gispara declined many opportunities to explain her method before an assembly of the Affiliation of Unaffiliated Wizards.

Because their debate has been polite and without malice, the pair has for nearly a decade privately exchanged gifts for New Year's Dawn. Athon always gives Gispara a kitchen utensil made of cast iron. In return, Gispara gives Athon a box of nails.

Gispara has been overheard wryly observing that, as she is not a carpenter but still does some of her own cooking, "I'm getting the better end of the deal."

THE CLOVEN NINE OF ZOBECK

by Ben McFarland

One of the more powerful gangs to emerge after the Great Revolt, the Cloven Nine are a band of criminals led by tieflings and infernal- or abyssal-blooded sorcerers, each with their own crew. Supposedly, they possess links to the Consul, Lord Greymark, and to the various Kariv clans which frequent Zobeck or maintain permanent populations, particularly the diabolist clan of the Heph. Started by Akad the Elder, they initially existed as just a gang of rabble-rousers and posers, the third sons and illegitimate children of merchant houses who played at organized crime and intrigue.

They gathered at the Broken Seal, extorted businesses and barge captains, ran private gambling events, and offered devil-fueled magics and divinations to any willing to pay in silver or blood. Of the larger nefarious groups in Zobeck, they seemed both casual and potent, at least until Akad's murder. The brazen, cold-blooded assassination of the Nine's founder in the heart of the Broken Seal served as the catalyst event that reforged their enterprise from a dalliance of privilege to a razor sharp endeavor of power and ambition. While they still maintain their regular haunts of the Broken Seal, the Silk Scabbard, or the Wheatsheaf, their relaxed demeanor is gone, replaced by cruel and merciless criminal sensibilities.

New Order of the City

Over the last ten years, the Cloven Nine have avenged Akad's death and tightened their grip on their illegal operations. The body left impaled on the spikes of the Puffing Bridge left no question as to what happened to those who attempted to cross them. They discovered a spy within their ranks who had collaborated with the elder's assassin and ritually sacrificed him, using his soul to power a curse which caused the left ring finger of his immediate family to wither and fall off. What began as a loose circle of disaffected children of rich families is now a cabal of bloodthirsty and ambitious magic-wielders intent on carving personal empires out of the flesh of Zobeck.

They consolidated their tavern hangouts into true bases of operation, securing public and private spaces where they could still dabble in activities like gambling or extortion but also allow them to expand into bookmaking and drug dealing. Their access to the Cartways from the Silk Scabbard meant the Nine could occasionally smuggle contraband as well as people, and a shift from revenge-based diabolic magics to purer divination meant they could better know where the Watch and rivals might be lying in ambush. This has allowed them to grow their wealth, which they have reinvested into securely built personal homes, reinforced cellars with casting spaces and Cartways entrances, and bribed low-level officials who keep them aware of raids and inspections.

Changes in the political landscape have meant changes in the gang's status among the elite as well. The now openly present shadow fey ambassador at Winter's Kiss appreciates their attitudes and methods. He has found them to be effective agents when he wants something done somewhere in Zobeck but doesn't wish to use his own assets. This has also drawn the attention of Lady Marack, commander of the Praetors of the Blue House, and by extension, the new Lady Mayor. The mayor and the leader of the secret police believe the Cloven Nine might be utilized to the greater benefit of Zobeck, acting as agents abroad in exchange for tacitly turning a blind eye to the gang's lesser activities, so long as those crimes don't affect the more respectable citizens of the Free City. The gang has only completed one such task for the Praetors, and the new relationship remains probationary.

Structure of the Nine

The Cloven Nine functions as a council of gang captains led by Izachar, aka "Eyebite" (LE male tiefling fighter 4/warlock 9). These captains are all sorcerers, diviners, or warlocks with devilish heritage, and each one leads a crew of fellow rogues, generally

assisted by a trusted lieutenant and including Kariv, local thugs, and various street urchins. They bring in random extra muscle when necessary, usually when they expect a situation to get violent, knowing new recruits are often eager to prove themselves and earn a permanent place as a trusted member and so take the greatest risks.

The assassination also caused the Nine to adjust their tactics and operations. Now, operational security is essential. Jobs and plans are never discussed in public spaces or while out drinking. Members who do so receive a single warning before losing their left ear as a final reminder that the world is listening for a chance to spill their blood. A third violation means death or expulsion and exile from Zobeck. While a couple of slow-learning members have already been warned and one has lost an ear, the rest of the crews seem to have gotten the message and no one else has needed a lesson.

The Nine's crews use extended observation, shifting graffiti marks, and dead drops to plan and coordinate focused heists targeting large scores of goods which can be easily sold to an outgoing smuggler, or offloaded at the Cartways Black Market to one of the visiting subterranean merchants. No jobs occur randomly or without a crew leader's permission, and the Cloven Nine keep the gang's confidences. The memory of Akad's murder ensures they remain loyal to each other. Additionally, they have expanded their magical research, looking for ways to secretly track and identify the hideouts, safehouses, and homes of their rivals. They use these new magics to mark their targets, allowing them to escape, and then surreptitiously follow the individuals, noting the destinations for whatever future unpleasantries the Cloven Nine deems necessary. The first few uses of these tactics have been quite effective, catching the recently arrived gnomish gang of the Blue Barbers unaware and allowing the Nine to negotiate a detente.

Spells of the Cloven Nine

In order to gain an edge against their enemies, the Cloven Nine developed a series of spells which aid them in efforts to locate rivals and keep their own trails and safehouses hidden.

ORDER OF REVENGE

3rd-level enchantment

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Touch

Components: V, S, M (a broken knife)

Duration: 1 hour/caster level

You touch a weapon or a bundle of 30 ammunition, imbuing them with spell energy. Any creature damaged by a touched, affected weapon leaves an invisibly glowing trail of their path until the spell expires. The caster may see this trail by casting *revenge's eye* or *see invisible*. Any other caster may see the trail by casting *see invisible*. Casting *dispel magic* on an affected creature causes that creature to stop generating a trail, and the trail fades over the next hour.

At Higher Levels. When you cast the spell using a slot of 4th level or higher, you can target one additional weapon or bundle of ammunition for each slot level above fourth.

REVENGE'S EYE

2nd-level divination

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Touch

Components: V, S, M (a pinch of silver, a fragment of knife blade)

Duration: Concentration, up to 1 hour

You touch a creature's visual organs and grant them the ability to see the trail left by creatures damaged by a weapon you cast *order of revenge* upon.

The targeted creature can distinguish between multiple affected creatures without effort. If you lose a trail due to a creature's sudden shift in location, like jumping or teleporting, you may concentrate as a move action, which does not provoke opportunity attacks. This reveals the direction and distance to where the trail resumes, so long as it is on the same plane. The trail remains visible if a creature flies or swims. It only stops if the creature dies, becomes the target of *dispel magic*, leaves the plane of existence, or the *order of revenge* spell expires.

This spell does not help the target discern illusions, does not identify magically altered or concealed creatures, nor see invisible creatures; it only reveals trails left by those affected by *order of revenge* also cast by the spellcaster.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 3rd level or higher, you can target +1 creature for each slot level above second.

VAGRANT'S NONDESCRIPT CLOAK

2nd-level abjuration

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Touch

Components: V, S, M (a pinch of crushed obsidian, a scrap of rag)

Duration: 1 hour

You touch a creature. The creature is warded against the effects of *faerie fire*, *hold person*, and *order of revenge* for the duration of the effect, granting them advantage on the saving throw against the effect and a saving throw each round they are affected by the spells. If the warded creature is the focus of *locate creature*, the caster may determine if the affected creature is within 1,000 feet but cannot determine the direction to the target of *vagrant's nondescript cloak*. If the creature is already affected by one of the warded spells, then both the effect and *vagrant's nondescript cloak* end immediately.

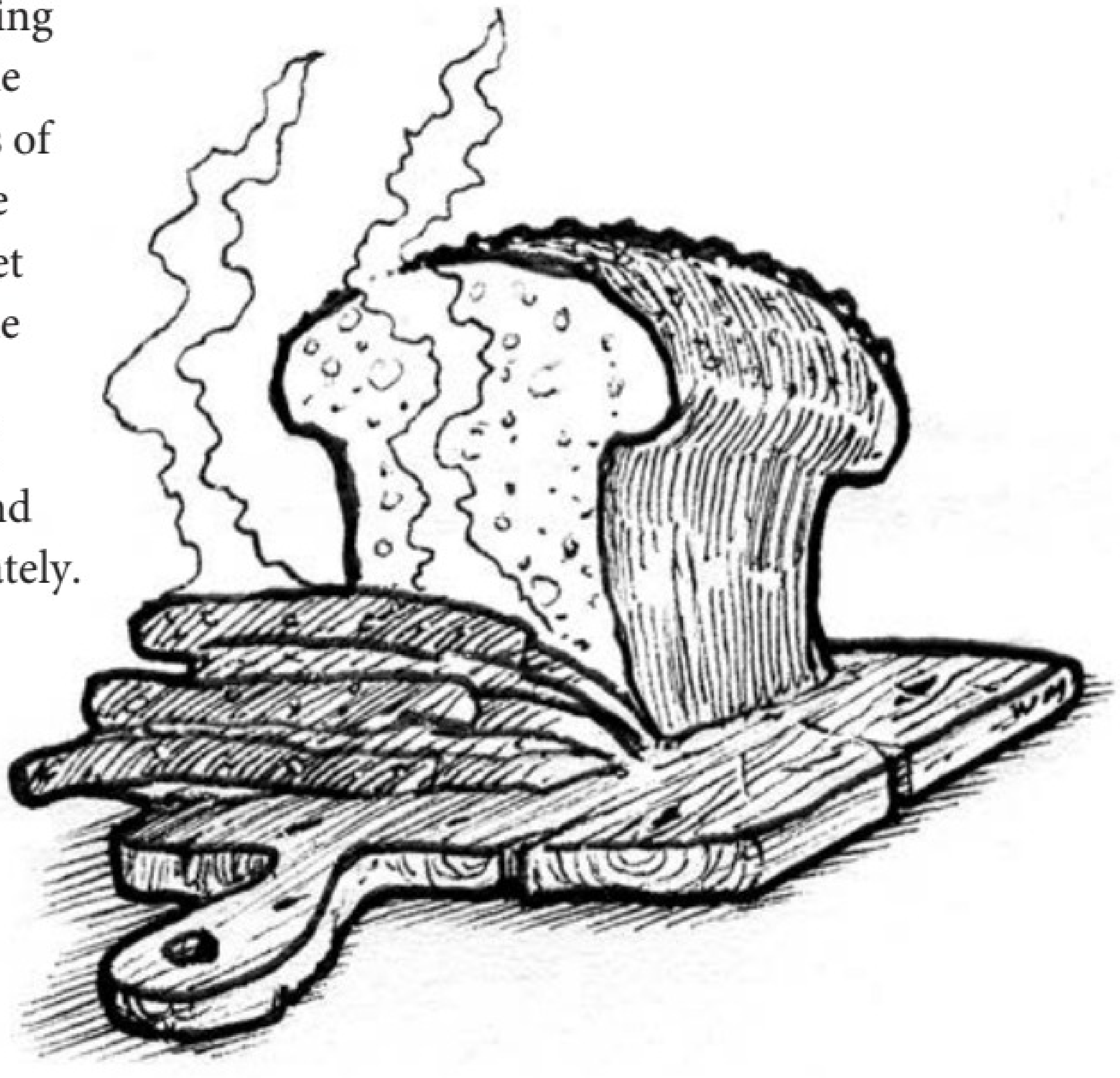
At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of third level or higher, you can target +1 creature for each slot level above second.

Story Seeds

There are many ways the player characters might become entangled with the Cloven Nine in the streets and alleyways of Zobeck.

LAST BEQUEST

The recent death of a former member of the Collegium has resulted in a large collection of books being donated to the library and faculty. It appears that many of these tomes deal with research on abjuration, divination, and enchantment, magical schools of great interest to the Cloven Nine. Ordinarily restricted to students of the Collegium, these new acquisitions are off-limits to outsiders, even if they are the talk of the arcane bar scene. The Cloven Nine intend to infiltrate the very heart of Zobeck's greatest educational institution, evade their guardians and spelltraps, and make off with the choicest manuscripts. Depending on the party's relationship to the Nine, they might be recruited to act as inside agents, part of the team committing the theft, or supplemental security when a Collegium magister's divination reveals a high chance the crime might happen tonight. How will



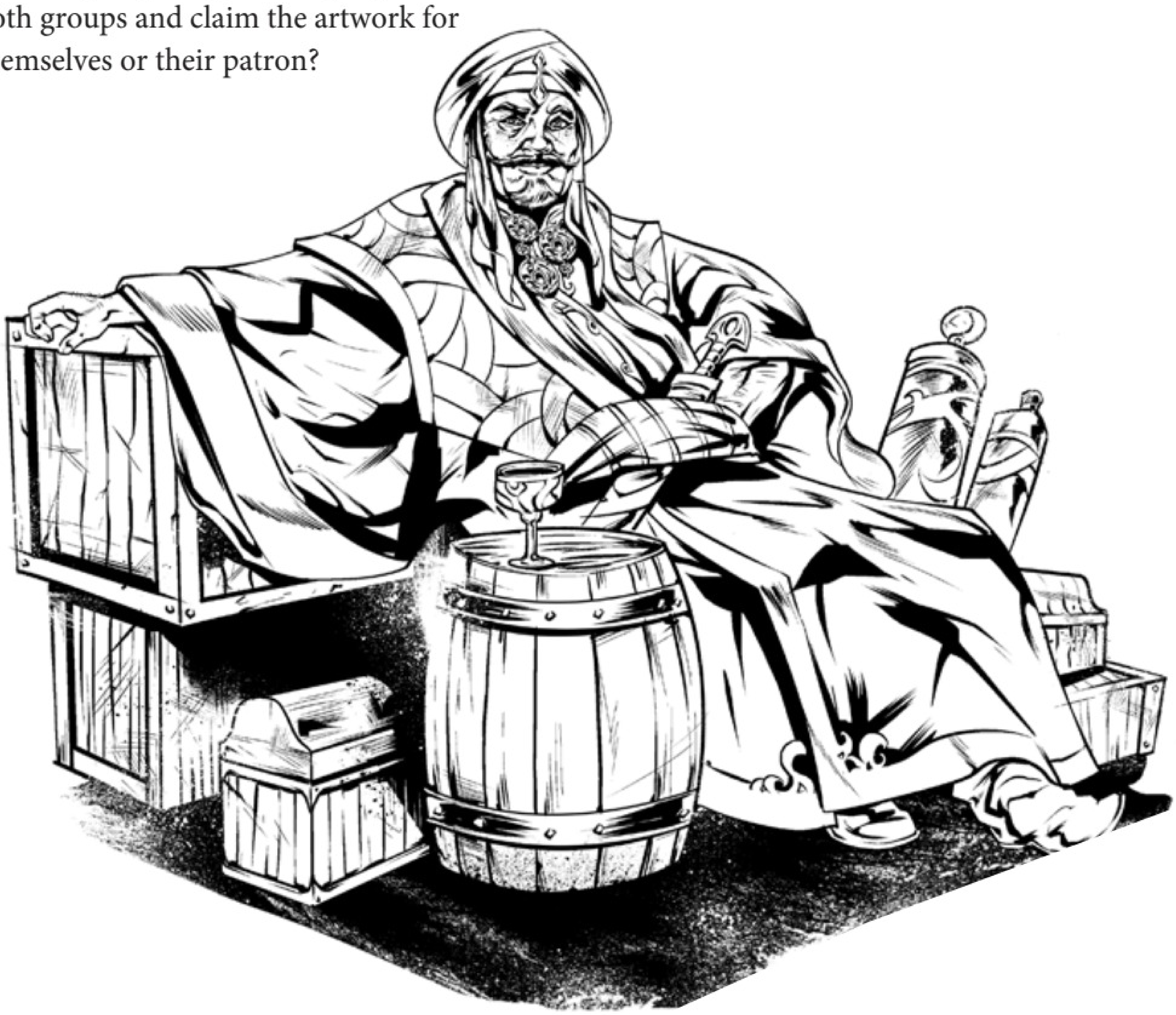
they respond when the books in question literally fall into their hands as an over-eager apprentice is killed trying to hide them and all sides suspect a double-cross?

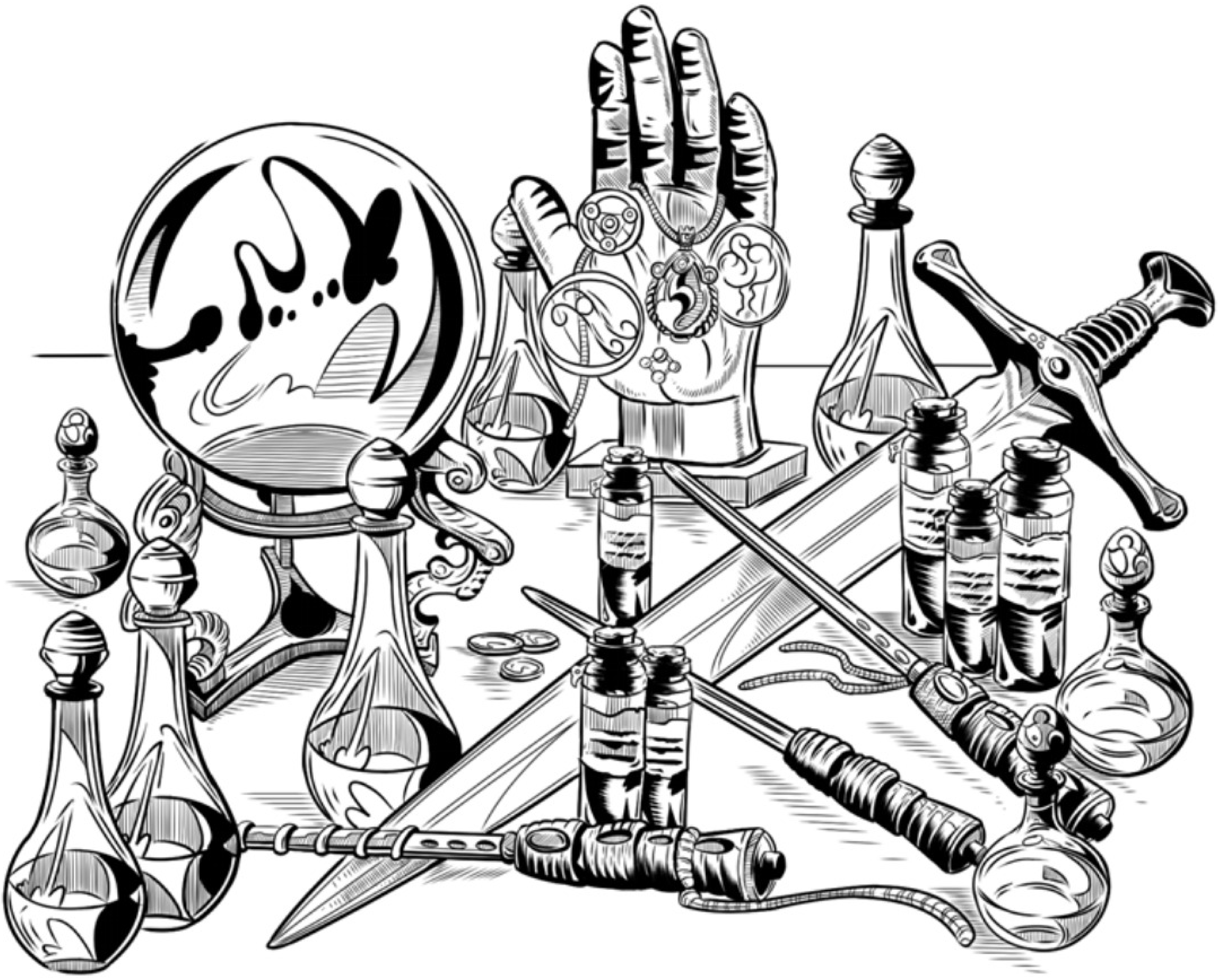
PICTURE PERFECT PARTY

A charity ball and auction is being held at the Old Stross Bathhouse, and the upper crust of Zobeck is all invited for what promoters swear will be a celebration for the ages. The usual décor of the bathhouse is being supplemented with great works of art by many popular contemporary and dead artisans of the region. One of these artisans' former students desperately desires the masterwork of a deceased mentor, and has hired the Cloven Nine to replace the one being displayed at the ball with a replica. Are the player characters part of the gang, bent on executing this heist? Are they part of the security, intent on thwarting the thieves? Or do they belong to another group altogether, trying to outsmart both groups and claim the artwork for themselves or their patron?

SEATS OF POWER

After a great deal of public unrest, the Free Council has decided to add two consuls to the board, both to be elected from the citizenry and serve for 10 years, offsetting the mayor's term. This has created quite a stir in folks as many merchants, laborers, and even kobolds seek to capture one of these offices. As sorcerers and diviners, the Cloven Nine believe they're in an excellent position either to sink an unacceptable candidate or to ensure their chosen hopeful wins. They approach the player characters, either thinking an individual might serve their needs or attempting to use the characters to engineer a series of events. How will the characters respond? Are they eager for a chance to engage the mighty gears of politics, or do they struggle to stop the Nine from interfering with the will of the people?





MAGIC

DEBRIS OF THE GREAT MAGE WARS

by Ben McFarland
(with special thanks to Robert Fairbanks)

The departure of the elves and the resulting conflict shaped Central Midgard in fundamental ways. At its core, the Great Mage Wars rise out of the hubris of the Fulgurate Society and leave behind a monument to humanity's capability for destructive spite.

Legacy of the Fulgurate Society

It began as a joke, a thumbing of their collective noses at the Elvish Empire of Valeran, the snide comments about humans being "all thunder and no lightning," when the Founding Circle of the Fulgurate Society chose their name in a secret gathering atop an old imperial tower. But from those humble beginnings, nine arcane spellcasters went on to carve out nations of humanity built on a foundation of great skill and art. The magocracies quickly achieved a begrudged parity with the Elvish Imperium, fueled by potent works and no lack of ambition. Initially, they strove to make their endeavors beautiful, functional, grand, and robust. Their spells pushed boundaries, their construction left one breathlessly awestruck, and the Fulgurate Society grew to serve as part of their shared heritage, an informal social organization, helping to avert misunderstandings and allowing backchannel communications. They labored to cease hostilities by denying access to those powers who overstepped treaties and by undoing the machinations of the treacherous mages who disobeyed their edicts or neglected unspoken rules and codes between their respective territories. Unfortunately, the Fulgurate Society was only human, and flaws of tangled emotion and spurned feelings eroded the foundations of their wondrous achievements. Resentment and jealousy festered, and as the Great Retreat concluded, the magocracies turned upon each other before a season had passed, attempting to claim the remnant vacuum.

Initially, in the wake of Luz's Escalation and the resulting Slumber of the Isonade, each magocracy controlled a Dread Walker, but the devastation left in their wake, combined with the ruthless spell effects of the great magi, embittered many. The destruction of Molovosch particularly weighed upon Enkada Pishtuhk, one of the more powerful and prominent members, and in the next gathering of the Fulgurate Society, supposedly in a declaration of vengeance related to a lost love, he utilized the nexus of ley lines once centered on the Lost Tower to summon Pah'draguusthlai while sinking the tower and its Glyph Stair perpendicular to reality. The resulting destruction of Uxloon suggests truth in the rumor. The magocracies fought for two full years after that betrayal before members finally managed the massive ritual invocation locking the remaining Walkers in their current dreaming stumble. However, the damage was complete; the glory and potential of the magocracies lay burnt from the land, leaving the smoldering cinder of the Wasted West and a few mystical heirlooms left to be discovered, in secret caches of scrolls and manuscripts, by the intrepid, persistent, and lucky.

SPELLCRAFT OF THE LOST MAGOCRACIES

Presented below are a few lost secrets of the scions of Vael Turog.

TALONS OF A HUNGRY LAND

7th-level evocation (sorcerer, warlock, wizard)

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 60 feet

Components: V, S

Duration: Concentration, up to 10 minutes

You cause three parallel lines of thick, flared obsidian spikes to erupt from the ground. They appear within range on a solid surface, last for the duration, and provide three-quarters cover to creatures behind them. You can make lines (up to 60 feet long, 10 feet high, and 5 feet thick) or form a circle (20 feet in diameter, up to 15 feet high and 5 feet thick). The lines provide three-quarters cover to creatures behind them.

When the lines appear, each creature within their area must make a Dexterity saving throw. On a failed save, a creature takes 8d8 slashing damage or half as much damage on a successful save.

A creature can move through the lines at the risk of cutting themselves on the exposed edges. For every 1 foot a creature moves through the lines, it must spend 4 feet of movement. Furthermore, the first time a creature enters the lines on a turn or ends its turn there, the creature must make a Dexterity saving throw. It takes 8d8 slashing damage on a failed save or half as much damage on a successful one.

When you cease concentrating on the spell, you may cause the obsidian spikes to explode, causing 5d8 slashing to any creature within 15 feet or half as much damage on a successful Dexterity save.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 7th level or higher, the damage from all effects of the lines increases by 1d8 for each slot level above 7th.

VENGEFUL PANOPLY OF THE LEY LINE IGNITED

6th-level evocation (ley line; sorcerer, warlock, wizard)

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: self

Components: V, S

Duration: Concentration, up to 10 minutes

While bound to a ley line, you draw directly from its power, becoming cloaked in a magical heliotropic fire that sheds dim light in a 10-foot radius. Additionally, each round, including the round it is cast, you may make a ranged spell attack as an action. On a hit, the target takes 6d6 force damage. Every 3 minutes the effect is active, your bond with the ley line is reduced by one step; a bond to a Titanic ley line becomes effectively a Strong, then a Weak, and after 10 minutes, the bond is broken. The strength of the bond is only restored after a long rest; if the bond was broken, it can only be restored at the next weakest level for a week. A bond broken from a Weak ley line cannot be restored for two weeks. Some believe this spell damages ley lines, pointing to the lack of ley lines in the Wasted West as proof. Bemmea forbids this spell; its use is punishable by death of one's lineage, defined as the spellcaster along with any spellcaster ever apprenticed to the punished spellcaster or to an apprentice of the punished spellcaster.

Additionally, whenever a creature within 5 feet hits you with a melee attack, the cloak erupts with a heliotropic flare. The attacker takes 3d6 force damage.

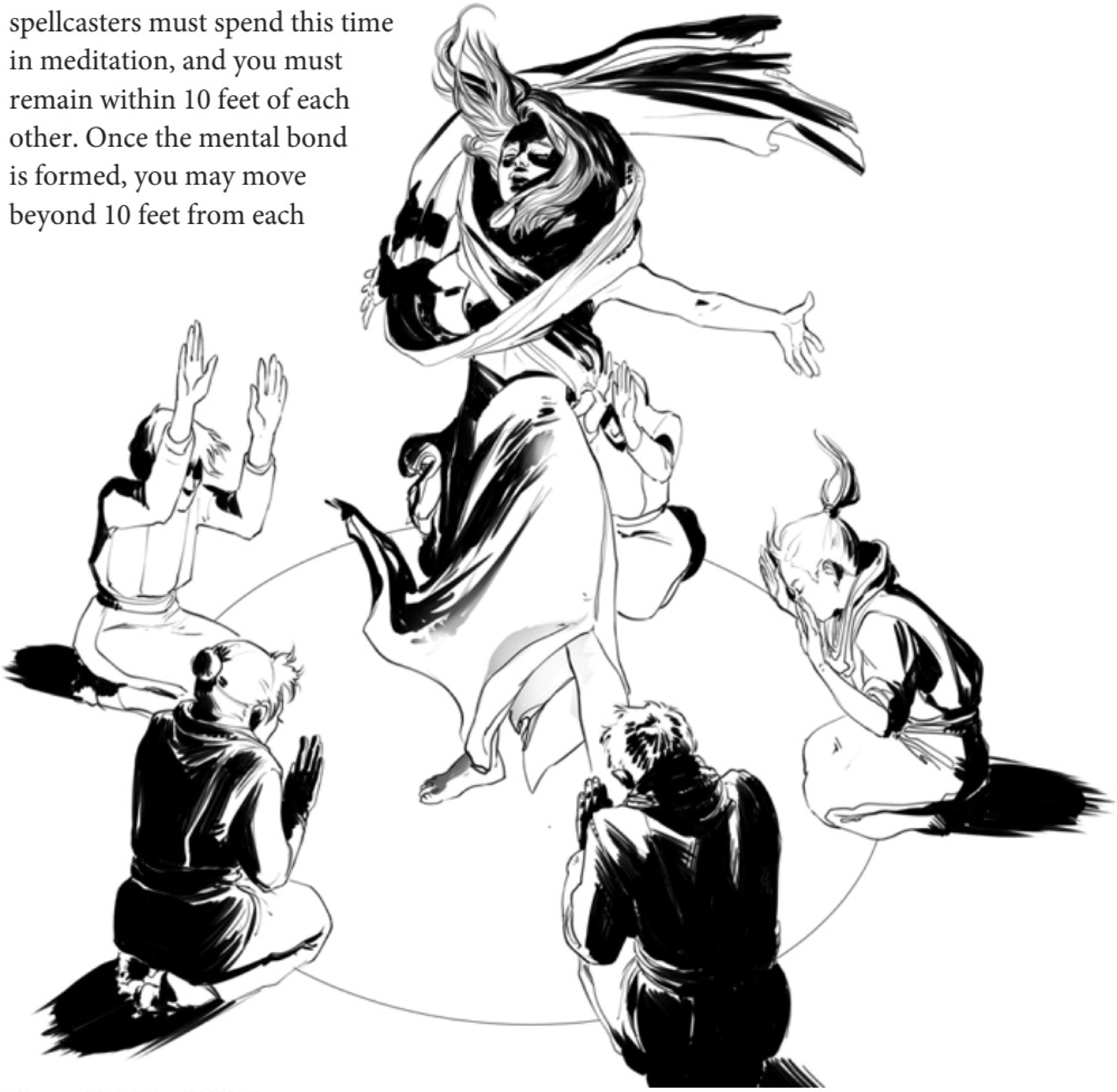
At Higher Levels. When casting this spell using a spell slot of 6th level, the damage from all effects of the spell increase by 1d6 for each slot level above 6th.

Feat: Cooperative Caster

Prerequisite: Ability to cast one arcane spell.

You have discovered secrets of the lost magocracies, learning how to pool your magical might with allied arcane casters and permitting you to augment spells beyond your normal limits. You gain the following benefits:

- Increase your Intelligence or Charisma score by 1, to a maximum of 20.
- You can spend 2 hours, including during a long rest, creating a mystical mental bond with a number of other spellcasters equal to your proficiency bonus minus 1. You and the other involved spellcasters must spend this time in meditation, and you must remain within 10 feet of each other. Once the mental bond is formed, you may move beyond 10 feet from each other and work together to bolster each other's magic. When one of you casts a spell that benefits from being cast at a higher level, you may use any bonded spellcaster's level to determine the benefits (up to twice your level), or if the spell would benefit from being cast at a higher slot, any of the other bonded spellcasters may use their reaction to sacrifice spell slots of any level to create the final effect. The sum of these sacrificed slots may not exceed 9th level for spells of 4th level or less and may not exceed twice the level for spells of 5th to 9th level. This bond may be dispelled and is treated as having a level equal to half your level minus 1 (minimum 1); if it is dispelled, each bonded member suffers 4d6 psychic



damage from the strain. If a bonded member dies, each other member suffers 2d6 psychic damage. You may only have one active bonding at a time; if you create a new bonding, the previous bond breaks. Otherwise, it lasts until the end of your next long rest.

Story Seed: ***The Sins of the Master.*** After receiving a book detailing cooperative casting and the spell *vengeful panoply of the ley line ignited*, summoned creatures and bounty hunters begin attacking the group's arcane caster. The masters of the School of Exalted Magics in Bemmea discovered the spellcaster's great-grand-master, now thrice-removed but living in Bemmea, casting the banned spell, and enacted the Edict of Lineage's Death. The group must travel to Bemmea and clear the group member's reputation before the Arcane Magistrate or face deadly hunters for the rest of their lives!

Relics of the War

The sentries laughed from the high walls of many-spired Andarre when archmage N'Lok-Thrang stood before their gates barefoot and disheveled, innocently suggesting the prudence of the city's immediate surrender—to him. Within hours, the guards lay glassy-eyed silent, and many-spired Andarre smoldered, a noxious lake of sizzling mud and shattered marble. Old Dusthowler, whistling away, already trundled down the Trenorra Road, strolling toward his next proposal.

—The Journals of Thessavia Vhex,
Mercurial Guard Captain

The apocalyptic magnitudes of wild-eyed devastation, reality-warping blasphemies, and crimes against civilization characterizing the final years of the Great Mage Wars exceeded most sane imaginations. The conventions of war, arcane or otherwise, ceased to exist while the nine magocracies "wielded" their titanic void-born against one another and the very landscape. Each nation schemed and struggled against the other, against nature, and many against the madness in their unfettered ambitions in an attempt to capture central Midgard for themselves.

Mercurial Guard reconnaissance cadre reports state Vael Turog deliberately conjured first boneshard storms at Flensing Gulch, intending to obliterate two cavalry legions, including a detachment of Mavros's Sanguine Company, maneuvering secretly from Barenna to the Coruscate Tower. Images from *fulgurate mementos* show soldiers in glyph armor lived longest, helplessly watching as splintered, wind-tossed fragments of their mangled comrades haphazardly transformed amid the whirling, foul magics into clouds of bone chips intent on finishing the deed.

These battlefronts swept across the magocracies like forces of nature; they cared little for any smaller towns and communities caught in their wake. People fled into the countryside when the war drew close but often not before burying their wealth in a basement vault, in a wall, or beneath a threshold, unwilling to deliver their treasure into the hands of an approaching army that cared little about civilians, regardless of allegiance. Urns of coins, precious heirlooms, and beloved gifts slipped into darkness, unintentionally abandoned when the previous owner died before being able to recover their cache. For good or ill, these forgotten inheritances, strange evidences, lost knowledge, and buried mementos of this age of war and madness continue to resurface as scavengers test their luck with each expedition into the Wasted West.

COAT OF DUST AND ASH

Wondrous item, legendary (requires attunement)

Worn ragged, this cowled and belted longcoat sports chewed cuffs and tattered hems. Its perpetually dusty, mottled gray exterior still bears the runic-insignia of the reconnaissance cadre of the Mercurial Guard stitched in tarnished silver thread inside the hood.

While wearing a *coat of dust and ash*, you gain the following benefits:

- You have advantage on saving throws to resist poison or disease.
- You have advantage on initiative and on Dexterity (Stealth) checks to hide, and difficult (desert or mountain) terrain doesn't cost you extra movement.

When wearing the coat within the borders of the Wasted West, you gain the following additional benefits:

- You double your proficiency bonus on Wisdom (Survival) checks made while outdoors. When not in combat, you (and those you lead) may travel between any two locations within the Wastes twice as fast as your speed would normally allow.
- The aberrant weather conditions common to the Wastes (bone, dust, and sandstorms) do not impose disadvantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks relying on hearing or sight. You gain a +3 bonus to your passive Wisdom (Perception) and passive Intelligence (Investigation) scores while outdoors.
- ***Dust-Devil (1/long rest)***. You conjure an irradiated dust mephit companion for up to 4 hours, which behaves per *conjure minor elemental*. Alter the dust mephit statblock with the following traits: **AC** 13, **HP** 28 (8d6); ***Innate Spellcasting*** adds *burning hands* and *faerie fire* 1/day each; ***Claws*** and ***Blinding Breath*** both add the poisoned condition to their effects and DCs increase to 13.

Story Seed: ***Pearls Before***. . . A common scavenger and petty criminal, Mikhail the Stoat apparently made some "great discovery" in the Wastes. This find has drawn such attention, the group is hired to find the Stoat. War lingers on the horizon after the events in Krakova, and local powers refuse to risk a potent device being left in the hands of a half-crazed, wasteland looter. Reports of madness and murder follow in Mikhail's wake, and the rarities confiscated from past clientele have convinced important people there's value in bringing this vagabond in for questioning.

FULGURATE MEMENTO

Wondrous item, rare (requires attunement)

The open end in this irregularly cylindrical mineral formation reveals a twisting, crystalline interior, flashing in a faint kaleidoscope of lavender energies. Deep, desert time-storm lightning strikes form these oddly shaped geodes, highly sought in the later years of the Mage Wars. Scholars and scavengers alike find them sometimes attached to decorative or personalized lanyards of silver or adamantine. This value stems from a reputation as inscrutable, powerful tools of arcane warfare, information gathering, and espionage, espoused by both field commanders and senior officers of the Mercurial Guard.

While attuned to the *fulgurate memento*, you gain the following benefits:

- You always know direction and distance to the nearest Great Walker.
- You have resistance to psychic, necrotic, and poison damage from the attacks, spells, and spell-like effects of Great Walkers and their minions.
- You have advantage on saving throws against being charmed or poisoned and against illusions or mind-influencing spells and effects originating from Great Walkers and their minions.
- You can use an action to peer into the crystalline oculus of the memento, choosing one of the following effects:

  Recollect. Used as battlefield recorders and visual transmitters during the Great Mage Wars, you may utilize the *fulgurate memento* to observe events long past.

Remind. You commit a memory of an event or a message up to 2 minutes long within the item, which can be viewed later using the Recollect power. Up to four memories may be stored in the item, and if one must be overwritten, you may choose which one.

Revisit. You may observe the actions, movement, and immediate surroundings of any Dread Walker of which you know the name. You receive visual information only but are unrestricted in the movement, angle, or distance of your perspective within a 1,000-ft. radius of the creature.

SIBILANT GLYPH ARMOR

Wondrous item (armor), very rare (requires attunement)

This hardened, grey and black plate armor, with hammered imprints of strange symbols, lacquered eyes, and engraved mouths, feels weightless when worn, but owners say its burden is mental. Some claim it whispers when not worn.

Fashioned from an incredibly tough and lightweight substance lost to time, the armor is covered in disturbing glyphs, multi-pupiled eyes, and twisted mouths that seem sculpted from the material and shift when no one is looking. While wearing this unsettling light armor, you gain a +6 bonus to AC and the following benefits:

- The ancient and now only instinctually known origins of the armor grant you advantage on Charisma (Intimidation and Persuasion) checks while interacting dust goblins of the Wasted West.
- Your initiative rolls have advantage.
- You can consult the sibilant armor three times per long rest, asking any three detailed questions relative to Arcana, History, or Religion and regarding knowledge or past events transpiring within the Wasted West. The armor answers mentally in a burst of images. Each time you use this ability, you must succeed on a DC 13 Charisma saving throw or suffer 1 random, long-term madness (save again after 1 week until successful). If used more than once in 24 hours, the DC increases to 16 and the madness intensifies.

Restless Dead

In the wake of the Battle of Flensing Gulch and the defeat of the last of Caelmarath's Indomitables by a summoned boneshard tempest, the nearly innumerable dead arose to haunt the area as boneshard wraiths, a form of undead creature only truly encountered in the Wasted West. The Bonewraith goblin tribe worships these creatures and sends their elders out to be consumed and transformed by them.

A vaguely humanoid form appears dim and hazy amid the constant swirl of wind-wracked grit and tainted dust of the Western Wastes . . .

Contorted and broken, a ghostly horror, haphazardly assembled from mismatched bones and grave-scavenged shards, now glides in the air. Shattered eye sockets burn with the black, icy glow of eternal madness and the spiteful hunger of the void.

BONESHARD WRAITH

Medium undead, neutral evil

Armor Class 16

Hit Points 128 (15d8 +60)

Speed 15 ft., fly 60ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
16 (+3)	13 (+1)	18 (+4)	13 (+1)	14 (+2)	8 (−2)

Skills Perception +6, Stealth +7

Damage Resistances acid, cold, fire, lightning, thunder; piercing, bludgeoning or slashing from weapons that are non-magical or not silvered

Damage Immunities necrotic, poison

Condition Immunities blinded, charmed, exhausted, frightened, grappled, paralyzed, petrified, poisoned, prone, restrained, stunned, unconscious

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 16
Languages any languages it knew in life, Void Speech
Challenge 9 (5,000 XP)

Incorporeal Movement. The boneshard wraith can move through other creatures and objects as if they were difficult terrain. It takes 9 force damage if it ends its turn inside an object.

Sunlight Sensitivity. While in sunlight, the wraith has disadvantage on attack rolls as well as on Wisdom (Perception) checks that rely on sight.

ACTIONS

Boneshard Cyclone. The wraith envelops a target within 60 ft. in a whirlwind of sharp bone fragments. The target must succeed on a DC 15 Strength saving throw or become deafened and blinded while taking 20 (3d12) slashing damage and 27 (6d8) necrotic at the start of each of the wraith's turns or until the save succeeds (repeated at the start of the target's turns). Any creature killed in this way rises as a boneshard wraith on the next new moon unless the remains are *blessed*. Only 1 Boneshard Cyclone may be active per wraith.

Spectral Claw. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +7 to hit, reach 15 ft., one target. *Hit:* 21 (4d8 + 3) slashing damage and target must succeed on a DC 14 Constitution saving throw or gain 1 level of exhaustion (maximum 2 levels/ target /rest).

Multiattack. The wraith makes two Spectral Claw attacks. If both attacks damage the same target creature, the target becomes paralyzed for 1 minute (DC 15 Constitution saving throw each round to remove condition)

VOID-TOUCHED: WARPED FLESH AND TWISTED MINDS

by Dan Dillon

Forgotten voices whisper from places darker than deepest Shadow, promising power. Moldering tomes, covered in script whose very letters and sigils cause gorge to rise and stone to rot, hold secrets lost to the sane world. The Void lingers just out of reach but ever seeking entry. It is the space between planes, emptiness leftover from when the multiverse came into being: a place of living non-existence. It is the nothing whose contrast gives meaning to the whole of creation. Its existence and the nightmarish creatures spawned by it are a mindbending enigma, the answer to which eludes the most learned sages. In truth, the sane mortal mind is incapable of fully fathoming the Void—which is why those who study its depths are all quite mad.

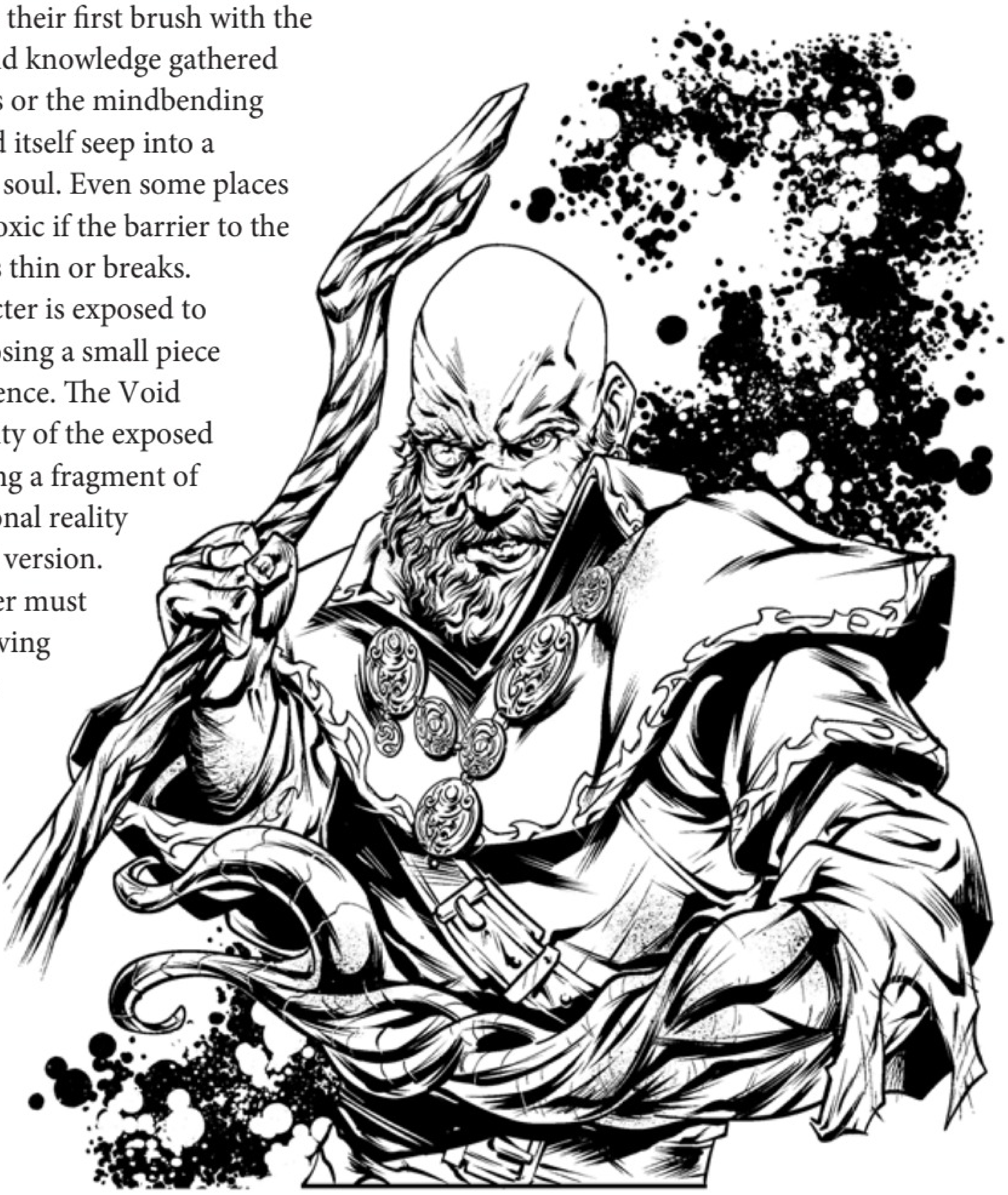
The Void offers power and knowledge, for it touches all places and times, but everything it offers comes with a price. The desperate or foolhardy often agree to its terms without understanding what it is they do. Other beings of great power begin their study secure in the belief that their might will save them. The greatest of these are the void dragons of Midgard who soar in the darkness between stars. There in the cold sidereal emptiness, the Void grows close. The void dragons slipped past the nihil-boundary in the dark reaches of space and gazed long and deep into the Void. Even they are irrevocably broken and carry the Void's touch with them into the world.

Even some creatures spawned of the world and planes known to mortals carry a touch of the Void within them, like a splinter in the soul. Many aberrations are so touched, their bizarre habits, nightmarish physical forms, and utterly alien mindsets giving terrifying testament to the corruptive influence. Aboleths, in particular, long ago snatched secrets from it and included aspects of Void Speech into their strange glyph language. These symbols corrupt and twist the very stone into which they are carved and taint the natural world in their vicinity. Void energies similarly reach out to many undead creatures, finding resonance and purchase within the antithesis of life that necrotic energy and undeath represent. Places where undead and aberrations dwell in numbers or where they often spawn can sometimes bear flaws in the walls of reality—areas that have worn thin between *what is* and *what is no*t.

Touch of the Void

The Void exists outside the realm of sanity and form. Creatures exist there, spawned by unknown powers and processes, who constantly seek entry into the living, physical world. More than that, the Void itself seems almost alive or at least under some constant pressure to spread and expand—to consume. Creatures who taste its power expose themselves to its touch, and that touch is corruptive. It bears a taint that seeps into physical, spiritual, and mental being. Void magic is powerful and often destructive, its spells reinforced with the blasphemous intonations of Void Speech, and it is the most common way for mortals, particularly adventurers, to have their first brush with the Void's taint. Lore and knowledge gathered from tainted sources or the mindbending unreality of the Void itself seep into a creature's mind and soul. Even some places become spiritually toxic if the barrier to the existing world wears thin or breaks.

Whenever a character is exposed to Void taint, it risks losing a small piece of itself to that influence. The Void attacks the very reality of the exposed character, overwriting a fragment of the character's personal reality with its own twisted version. An exposed character must make a Charisma saving throw with a DC set by the severity of the exposure. A wizard character of the Void Speaker Arcane Tradition or a character who possesses a Void Magic feat has advantage on saving throws made to resist Void taint. (For more information on Void Magic, see *Deep Magic 3: Void Magic* or the *Midgard Worldbook*.)



VOID EXPOSURE	CHARISMA SAVE DC
Finishes a rest within a Void-tainted area	10
Learns Void-tainted lore	10
Attunes a Void-tainted magic item	15
Learns a Void magic spell	10 + spell level
Subjected to a Void magic spell of 6th level or higher	Caster's spell save DC
Encounters a creature of the Void for the first time	10 + creature's Charisma modifier
Exposed to the Void itself	20

VOID TAINT EFFECTS

On a failed save, the character suffers one point of Void taint and is afflicted with **short-term madness** (see the 5E SRD). On a success, the character might still be shaken or upset by the experience but suffers no ill effects. Once a character has succeeded on a saving throw against a particular type of Void exposure, it is unaffected by further exposures of the same type until it finishes a long rest.

Void taint is a cumulative measure of the Void's influence and corruption of a creature. When the character's Void taint reaches a threshold equal to its proficiency bonus + its Charisma modifier (minimum of 1), it is afflicted with **indefinite madness**, and its Void taint resets to zero. If a character has any Void Magic feats, it can add the number of Void Magic feats it possesses to its maximum threshold of Void taint. A Void Speaker wizard doubles its total Void taint threshold. Accumulated Void taint is permanent until the creature reaches its threshold.

Sometimes, the Void's touch manifests in a physical way, rather than a spiritual or mental one. Characters can maintain their sanity by containing their growing Void taint within their own bodies. Such a measure isn't without cost as the sliver of the Void works its way into the character's flesh and changes it in ways both subtle to terrifying. A character who uses this option isn't afflicted by indefinite madness but instead suffers a **flesh warp**.

A flesh warp is a physical deformity that immediately overtakes the character's body. Flesh warps are unsettling things and impose disadvantage on Charisma checks for any purpose other than intimidation made against a creature not of the Void. A flesh warp lasts until cured.

NEW INDEFINITE MADNESS

d10	FLAW (LASTS UNTIL CURED)
1	"I am obsessed with discovering the hidden meaning in seemingly random objects, such as shards of smashed glass."
2	"Some event in my life never happened. I won't acknowledge it or anything to do with it."
3	"I can hear them whispering, always whispering. They're loudest near corners of rooms and other angles in structures."
4	"I constantly scrawl a certain set of strange glyphs without realizing it, sometimes even so far as to cut them into my own skin."
5	"When I'm excited or upset, some of my words come out in a different language. One that I don't actually speak or understand."
6	"The trappings and symbol of a certain deity cause me great pain to look upon or touch."
7	"Ordered collections of objects are fascinating, and I have to study and count them."
8	"I collect strange or disgusting trinkets, such as teeth of creatures I kill or scrapings of dirt from everywhere I sleep."
9	"The music is always with me, and I have to let it out. It doesn't matter that no one else finds the song as beautiful as I do."
10	"I hear scratching just on the other side of interior walls."

CURING FLESH WARPS & VOID TAINT

A *greater restoration* spell cast on a character with Void taint removes one point of taint in addition to the spell's normal effects if the target of the spell succeeds on a DC 15 Charisma saving throw. Flesh warps are permanent manifestations of the Void within the body of a tainted character and are incredibly difficult to remove. A *regeneration* spell or more powerful magic is required to rid a character of a flesh warp.

FLESH WARPS

d10	EFFECT (LASTS UNTIL CURED)
1	**Bulging Eye**. The character has disadvantage on ranged attacks made against targets farther than 30 ft. away but can take the Search action as a bonus action.
2	**Eyeless.** The character permanently gains the blinded condition. This condition can't be removed without curing this flesh warp. The character's other senses are enhanced by the Void, granting blindsight to a range of 10 ft. as long as the character can hear.
3	**Gleaming Skin**. The gleam grants advantage on Wisdom (Perception) checks made to locate the character by sight. While the character is in bright light and is hit by a melee attack, it can use its reaction to add 1 to its armor class if the attacker can see its skin.
4	**Scales**. The character's skin grows scales, bony plates, or becomes thick and leathery, granting an armor class of 14 + Dexterity modifier. The character's skin is also less pliant and numb and imposes disadvantage on Dexterity checks.
5	**Slime**. The character's skin produces a slick, gelatinous oil that provides advantage on Dexterity (Acrobatics) checks to avoid or escape a grapple or slip out of bonds. It allows the creature to pass through spaces large enough for a creature one size smaller than itself without squeezing. The slime trail grants advantage on checks made to track the character.
6	**Stench**. Any creature that starts its turn within 5 ft. of the character must succeed on a DC 12 Constitution saving throw or be poisoned until the start of the creature's next turn. This stink clings to any objects that have been in the character's possession for 24 hours. Attempting to sell any such object may be impossible or yields only half the normal price at best. Food in the character's possession spoils after 24 hours.
7	**Talons**. The character can use the talons to make unarmed strikes that deal 1d4 plus Strength modifier slashing damage. The character has disadvantage on Dexterity checks involving fine manipulation with its hands and can't wear close-toed footwear.
8	**Tentacles**. One of the character's hands twists into a nest of writhing tentacles. Any check or saving throw made to maintain grip or grapple with the tentacles has advantage. Any check or saving throw involving fine motor control or Dexterity with the tentacles has disadvantage.
9	**Tusks**. The character grows large tusks and can use them to make unarmed strikes that deal 1d4 plus Strength modifier piercing damage. If the character casts a spell with a verbal component that has a casting time longer than 1 round, they must succeed on a DC 10 Constitution saving throw to successfully cast the spell.
10	**Twisted Teeth**. Mouths grow on random parts of the character's body. If the character is grappling a creature at the start of its turn, the teeth deal 1d4 piercing damage to the grappled creature. While the character wears medium or heavy armor or heavy clothing, the teeth ache and grind against the armor, causing disadvantage on Wisdom checks due to discomfort and distraction.

FONTS OF POISON AND POWER

by James J. Haeck

Beneath the streets of Zobeck, deep in the darkness of fabled Old City's subterranean chambers, strange waters bubble up through unused water pumps and trickle down from the ancient stones. These springs flow not just with water but with the primordial and unpredictable magic of the earth. Explorers of the Old City curious enough to dip their cup into the waters of these enchanted fonts and drink deep of their magic may be rewarded with incredible power—or cursed for their failure to judge the fountain's unfathomable dangers.

Of course, magic fountains can appear in any fantastic location, not just ancient subterranean ruins like the buried Old City. The springs in this article are particularly well-suited to ancient cities but can be adapted to any dungeon environment.

Magic Fountain Details

Every fountain has a unique appearance, which is described in boxed text you can read or paraphrase when the characters discover it.

When a creature takes its first drink from a magic fountain, it must drink at least four ounces of water to gain the fountain's effects. Drinking any less has no effect and drinking more in one gulp has no further effects. If a character begins drinking more after the first drink, the fountain may have different effects.

Note also that enchanted water is no substitute for a potion. All magic disappears from a fountain's waters 30 seconds after it is removed from the fountain.

Magic Fountains

Below are a collection of sample fonts, each with an appearance, lore, and magical effects that any drinker can experience.

THE ADVENTURER

A chipped and weathered statue of a triumphant humanoid stands in the middle of this fountain. Its featured have been utterly worn away—any sign of its race or its profession have been lost to the elements, but its pose and build suggest it was some kind of adventurer.

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The GM chooses the type of adventurer this statue was dedicated to: Fighter (Strength), Rogue (Dexterity), Barbarian (Constitution), Wizard (Intelligence), Cleric (Wisdom), or Bard (Charisma). Use the adventurer's associated ability every time "ability check" or "ability score" is referenced in this fountain's description.

First Drink. The drinker must succeed on a DC 10 ability check with that score. A character of the same class as the statue has advantage on this check. On a success, the drinker's ability score increases by 1. On a failure, nothing happens.

Drinking More. The DC for each subsequent drink increases by 5. A character of the same class as the statue has advantage on this check. On a success, the drinker's ability score increases by 1. On a failure, the drinker's ability score permanently decreases by 1 and must roll on the Primordial Magic Surge table.

Lore. A character that succeeds on a DC 15 Intelligence (Investigation) check discovers faded writing on the base of the statue. It tells the class that the statue once was: "This water holds the memories of a hero who longs to meet a worthy pupil."

THE SHADOW QUEEN

Carved into the unhewn rock of the cave wall is an artistic rendition of a glamorous woman in flowing robes. Two great butterfly wings extend from her back and a pair of ram's horns curl from her temples. Water pours gently from the engravings into a small pool beneath the carving.

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First Drink. The drinker gains a warlock cantrip of the GM's choice. It fades from the drinker's memory after 1d4 hours.

Drinking More. The drinker gains the ability to cast a 1st-level warlock spell once. The next drink, the drinker gains the ability to cast a 2nd-level warlock spell once, and so on. All spells learned in this way fade after 1d4 hours.

PRIMORDIAL MAGIC SURGE

d10	WILD MAGIC EFFECT
1	You take 22 (4d10) cold damage and your movement speed is reduced by 10 for 1d4 hours.
2	You take 12 (5d4) psychic damage and are deafened for 1d4 hours.
3	You take 11 (2d10) necrotic damage and are blinded for 1d4 hours.
4	You take 7 (2d6) poison damage and are poisoned for 1d4 hours.
5	If the fountain's effects require rolling dice, roll twice as many. If not, nothing happens.
6	The duration of the fountain's effect is doubled. If permanent, nothing happens.
7	All numerical effects of the fountain are doubled.
8	The spirit of the fountain (**water elemental**) forms from the water of the pool. You may make a DC 15 Charisma (Intimidation or Persuasion) check. On a success, the elemental follows you as an ally for 1d6 × 10 minutes. On a failure, the elemental attacks until it is reduced to half its maximum hit points, then flees back into the fountain. If you do nothing and retreat from the fountain, the spirit returns into the fountain.
9	Your blood is infused with the magic of the spring. The effects of the magic fountain are extended for 1d6 × 10 minutes. During this time, any creature that makes a successful Bite attack against you or drinks your blood is affected as if it drank from the fountain.
10	You become a creature of pure water for 1d6 hours. While in this form, you gain the elemental type in addition to the humanoid type, the water form and freeze traits of a **water elemental**, and resistance to bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage from nonmagical attacks. Your body is still solid enough to hold your equipment.

After each drink, the drinker must make a Charisma saving throw with a DC equal to 10 + the spell level. On a failure, the drinker loses one spell slot for the day (if any) and must roll on the Primordial Magic Surge table.

Lore. A character that succeeds on a DC 15 Intelligence (History or Religion) check recalls a legend of a cult of warlocks that sacrificed their own spells to grant power to the Queen of the Shadow Fey. They worshiped the Shadow Queen at cave carvings like this.

THE DRAGON

A small gargoyle in the shape of a dragon emerges from the wall. Water flows from its mouth into a basin of tarnished copper held by its stone tail.

The GM chooses a type of chromatic dragon: black (acid), blue (lightning), green (poison), red (fire), or white (cold); or a color of metallic dragon: brass (fire), bronze (lightning), copper (acid), gold (fire), or silver (cold). Use the dragon's damage type whenever "damage" is referenced in this fountain's description.

First Drink. If the drinker is a dragonborn, half-dragon, or Draconic Ancestry sorcerer and their heritage matches the dragon statue's type, the drinker transforms into a young dragon for 1d4 hours. If the drinker is not one of the above, the drinker takes 3 (1d6) damage and rolls on the Primordial Magic Surge table.

Drinking More. If the drinker is a humanoid, they grow draconic wings, granting them a fly speed of 60 feet, and rolls on the Primordial Magic Surge table. These wings last for 1d4 hours.

Lore. A character that succeeds on a DC 15 Intelligence (Arcana) check determines that this spring's water contains traces of dragon blood linked to the type of dragon represented in the fountain.

THE PRIESTESS AND THE BATHING DEVIL

An overgrown fountain sits in the center of a ruined chapel. A statue of an angel stands in the middle of the fountain, and water flows into a basin in three stages. Water flows steadily from the angel's cupped hands, then into a jug held by stone cherub, then into a basin at the angel's feet. A statue of an imp sits in the basin, "bathing" in the water.

First Drink. The drinker regains 4d4 + 4 hit points.

Drinking More. On the second drink, the drinker regain 8d4 + 8 hit points. On the third drink and every drink thereafter, the drinker must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw, taking 12d4 + 12 poison damage and becoming poisoned for 1 hour on a failed save or taking half as much damage on a successful one.

Lore. A character that succeeds on a DC 15 Intelligence (Religion) check recalls an old parable of the Giving Angel and the Bathing Devil. In this story, a traveling priest of Ninkash gave pure water freely to the people of a poor neighborhood in Old Zobeck and made many friends. The next month, she returned with even more clean water, and all her friends brought their friends as well, and all shared in her generosity.

The third month, she returned to Zobeck with her greatest supply of pure water, but when she began to give it away, a flock of vandals and murderers snuck into her cart and poisoned the water, and all the people who drank from her cart died. Horrified, she checked her cart for signs of intruders, and all she saw was a vile imp cackling and bathing in her casks of water.

SPELLS FROM THE FIRE

by Steve Winter

These fourteen spells are suitable for a campaign that visits the City of Brass or that takes place in a setting where fire, heat, and the desert loom large, such as the Southlands. They're geared toward wizards, but there's no reason why sorcerers and warlocks—or even clerics and druids—can't have access to them if you decide it's appropriate in your campaign.

1st Level

AVERT EVIL EYE

1st-level abjuration
Casting Time: 1 action
Range: Touch
Components: V, S, M (a blue bead)
Duration: 1 hour

The evil eye takes many forms. Any incident of bad luck can be blamed on it, especially if a character recently displayed arrogance or selfishness. When *avert evil* eye is cast, the recipient has a small degree of protection against the evil eye for up to 1 hour. While the spell lasts, the target of the spell has advantage on saving throws against being blinded, charmed, cursed, and frightened. During the spell's duration, the target can also cancel disadvantage on one d20 roll the target is about to make, but doing so ends the spell's effect.

CANDLE'S INSIGHT

1st-level divination
Casting Time: 1 action
Range: 10 feet
Components: V, S, M (a blessed candle)
Duration: 10 minutes

Candle's insight is cast on its target as the component candle is lit. The candle burns for up to 10 minutes unless it's extinguished normally or by the spell's effect. While the candle burns, the caster can question the spell's target, and the candle reveals whether the target speaks truthfully. An intentionally misleading or partial answer causes the flame to flicker and dim. An outright lie causes the flame to flare and then go out, ending the spell. The candle judges honesty, not absolute truth; the flame burns steadily through even an outrageously false statement, if the target believes it's true.

Candle's insight is used across society: by merchants while negotiating deals, by inquisitors investigating heresy, and by monarchs as they interview foreign diplomats. In some societies, casting *candle's insight* without the consent of the spell's target is considered a serious breach of hospitality.

2nd Level

DAGGERHAWK

2nd-level transmutation

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Self

Components: V, S, M (a dagger)

Duration: 1 minute

When *daggerhawk* is cast on a mundane dagger, a ghostly hawk appears around the weapon. The hawk and dagger fly into the air and make a melee attack against one creature you select within 60 feet, using your spell attack modifier and doing 1d4 + (your spellcasting ability modifier) piercing damage on a successful hit. On your following turns, you can use a bonus action to cause the daggerhawk to attack the same target. Once a target is selected for the daggerhawk, it can't switch to any other. The daggerhawk has AC 14 and, although it's invulnerable to all damage, a successful attack against it that does bludgeoning, force, or slashing damage sends the daggerhawk tumbling, so it can't attack again until after your next turn.

FEATHER TRAVEL

2nd-level transmutation

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Touch

Components: V, M (a feather)

Duration: Concentration, up to 1 hour

The target of *feather travel* transforms into a feather (along with their clothing and other gear) and drifts on the wind. The drifting creature has a limited ability to control their travel. They can move only in the direction the wind is blowing and at the speed of the wind. They can, however, shift up, down, or sideways 5 feet per round as if caught by a gust, allowing them to aim for an open window or doorway, to avoid a flame, or to steer around an animal or another creature. When the spell ends, the feather settles gently to the ground and transforms back into the original creature.

At Higher Levels. When you cast *feather travel* using a spell slot of 3rd level or higher, two additional creatures can be transformed per slot level above 2nd.

FIRE DARTS

2nd-level evocation

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 20 feet

Components: V, S, M (a fire the size of a small campfire or larger)

Duration: Instantaneous

When this spell is cast on any fire that's at least as large as a small campfire or cooking fire, three darts of flame shoot out from the fire toward targets within 30 feet of the fire. Darts can be directed against the same or separate targets as the caster chooses. Each dart does 4d6 fire damage or half damage with a successful Dexterity saving throw.

At Higher Levels. When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 3rd level or higher, the damage increases by 1d6 for each slot level above 2nd.

3rd Level

BREEZE COMPASS

3rd-level divination

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: Self

Components: V, S, M (a magnetized needle)

Duration: Concentration, up to 1 hour

When you cast *breeze compass*, you must clearly imagine or mentally describe a location. It doesn't need to be a location you've been to as long as you know it exists on the Material Plane. Within moments, a gentle breeze arises and blows along the most efficient path toward that destination. Only you can sense this breeze, and whenever it brings you to a decision point (a fork in a tunnel, for example), you must make a successful DC 8 Intelligence (Arcana) check to deduce which way the breeze indicates you should go. The spell ends if the Intelligence check fails. The breeze guides you around cliffs, lava pools, and other natural obstacles, but it doesn't avoid enemies or hostile creatures.

TONGUE OF SAND

3rd-level illusion (ritual)

Casting Time: 1 minute

Range: 30 feet

Components: V, S

Duration: Until dispelled

Tongue of sand is similar in many ways to *magic mouth*. When you cast it, you implant a message in a quantity of sand. The sand must fill a space no smaller than 4 square feet and at least 2 inches deep. The message can be up to 25 words. You also decide the conditions that trigger the speaking of the message. When the message is triggered, a mouth forms in the sand and delivers the message in a raspy, whispered voice that can be heard by creatures within 10 feet of the sand.

Additionally, *tongue of sand* has the ability to interact in a simple, brief manner with creatures who hear its message. For up to 10 minutes after the message is triggered, questions addressed to the sand will be answered as you would answer them. Each answer can be no more than 10 words long, and the spell ends after a second question is answered.

4th Level

SEARING SUN

4th-level transmutation

Casting Time: 1 action

Range: 200 feet

Components: V, S, M (a magnifying lens)

Duration: Concentration, up to 1 minute

This spell intensifies the light and heat of the sun, so it burns exposed flesh. You must be able to see the sun when you cast the spell. The searing sunlight affects a cylindrical area 50 feet in radius and 200 feet high, centered on the target point. Every creature that starts its turn in that area takes 5d8 fire damage or half damage with a successful Constitution saving throw. A creature that's shaded by a solid object such as an awning, a building, or an overhanging boulder has advantage on the saving throw. On your turn, you can use an action to move the target point up to 20 feet in any direction along the ground.

LAVA STONE

4th-level transformation
Casting Time: 1 action
Range: Touch
Components: V, M (a sling stone)
Duration: Instantaneous

When you cast *lava stone* on a piece of sling ammo, the stone or bullet becomes intensely hot. As a bonus action, you can launch the heated stone with a sling: the stone increases in size and melts into a glob of lava while in flight. Make a ranged spell attack against the target. If it hits, the target takes 1d8 bludgeoning damage, plus 6d6 fire damage. The target takes additional fire damage at the start of each of your next three turns, beginning at 4d6, then 2d6, and then 1d6. The additional damage can be avoided if the target or an ally within 5 feet of the target scrapes off the lava. This is done by spending an action to make a successful Wisdom (Medicine) check against your spellcasting save DC. The spell ends if the heated sling stone isn't used immediately.

5th Level

SAND SHIP

4th-level transmutation (ritual)
Casting Time: 1 minute
Range: 30 feet
Components: V, S, M (a boat or ship of 10,000 gp value or less)
Duration: 24 hours

Casting *sand ship* on a water vessel up to the size of a small sailing ship transforms it into a vessel capable of sailing on sand as easily as water. The vessel still needs a trained crew and relies on wind or oars for propulsion, but it moves at its normal speed across sand instead of water for the duration of the spell. It can sail only through sand, not soil or solid rock. For the duration of the spell, the vessel doesn't float; it must be beached or resting on the bottom of a body of water (partially drawn up onto a beach, for example) when the spell is cast or it sinks into the water.

6th Level

FIREWALK

6th-level transmutation
Casting Time: 1 action
Range: Touch
Components: V, S
Duration: Concentration, up to 10 minutes

The creature you cast *firewalk* on becomes immune to fire damage. In addition, that creature can walk along any burning surface, such as a burning wall or burning oil spread on water, as if it were solid and horizontal. Even if there is no surface to walk on, the creature can walk along the tops of the flames themselves.

At Higher Levels: When you cast this spell using a spell slot of 7th level or higher, two additional creatures can be affected for each slot level above 6th.

7th Level

CREATE THUNDERSTAFF

7th-level transmutation
Casting Time: 10 minutes (ritual)
Range: Touch
Components: V, S, M (a quarterstaff)
Duration: Until depleted

When you cast *create thunderstaff* on a normal quarterstaff, it becomes like a sponge for loud, harsh sounds. The staff must then be mounted in a noisy location, such as a busy marketplace, and left there for 60 days. During those 60 days, the staff absorbs ambient sound, which has the pleasant effect of reducing what would normally be raucous, discordant noise into a background rumble that, while still noticeable, is not at all unpleasant or distracting. The staff doesn't detract from anyone's ability to converse or to

be heard, it just makes unwanted noise easy to ignore.

After 60 days, the staff is fully charged and can't absorb any more sound. At that point, it becomes a *thunderstaff*, a magic quarterstaff that grants a +1 bonus to melee attack and damage rolls made with it. In addition, the staff has 10 charges. When you hit with a melee attack with the staff and expend 1 charge, the target takes an additional 1d8 thunder damage. You can cast *thunderwave* from the staff as a bonus action by expending 2 charges. The staff doesn't recharge.

8th Level

WIND OF THE HEREAFTER

8th-level conjuration
Casting Time: 1 action
Range: 120 feet
Components: V, S, M (a vial of air from a tomb)
Duration: Concentration, up to 10 minutes

You create a 30-foot-radius sphere of roiling wind that carries the choking stench of death. The sphere is centered on a point you choose within range. The wind blows around corners. When a creature starts its turn in the sphere, it takes 8d8 necrotic damage or half damage with a successful Constitution saving throw. Creatures are affected even if they hold their breath or don't need to breathe.

The sphere moves 10 feet away from you at the start of each of your turns, drifting along the surface of the ground. It is not heavier than air but drifts in a straight line for the duration of the spell, even if that carries it over a cliff or gully. If the sphere meets a wall or other impassable obstacle, it turns to the left or right (select randomly).

9th Level

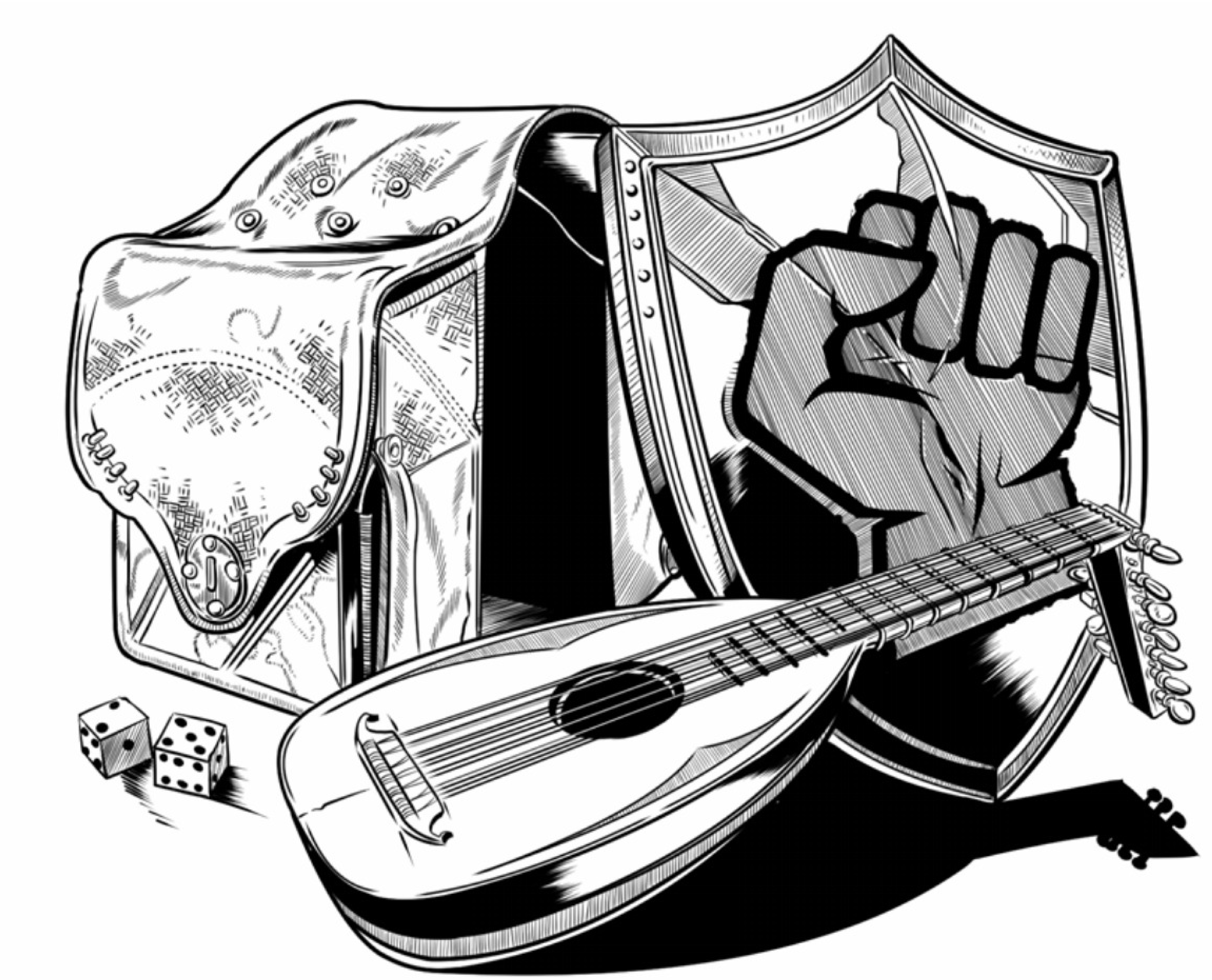
UNLEASH EFFIGY

9th-level transmutation
Casting Time: 1 action
Range: 60 feet
Components: V, S
Duration: Concentration, up to 10 minutes

You cause a stone statue that you can see within 60 feet of you to animate as your ally. The statue has the statistics of a stone golem. It takes a turn immediately after your turn. As a bonus action on your turn, you can order the golem to move and attack, provided you're within 60 feet of it. Without orders from you, the statue does nothing.

Whenever the statue has 75 hit points or fewer at the start of your turn or it is more than 60 feet from you at the start of your turn, you must make a successful DC 16 spellcasting check or the statue goes berserk. On each of its turns, the berserk statue attacks you or one of your allies. If no creature is near enough to be attacked, the statue dashes toward the nearest one instead. Once the statue goes berserk, it remains berserk until it's destroyed.

When the spell ends, the animated statue reverts to a normal, mundane statue.



PLAYER

ARSENAL OF VILLAINS: BLOOD CALLS TO BLOOD

by Dan Dillon

The practice of blood magic started with the wizard Taergash the Bloodpurger and sadly didn't end with his death when he bled out. His crimson-stained knowledge persists in the world, plundered from his laboratory by scheming apprentices and greedy adventurers. Aside from the spells he created or the magical heritage and traditions he spawned, the Bloodpurger's teachings live on in physical form through items and weapons imbued with blood magic.

BAND OF IRON THORNS

Wondrous item, rare (requires attunement)

This black iron armband bristles with long, needle-sharp iron thorns. When you attune to the armband, the thorns bite into your flesh. The armband doesn't function unless the thorns pierce your skin and are able to reach your blood.

While wearing the band, after you roll a saving throw but before the GM reveals if the roll is a success or failure, you can use your reaction to expend one hit die. Roll the die, and add the number rolled to your saving throw.

BLOOD PEARL

Wondrous item, uncommon

This crimson pearl feels slick to the touch and contains a mote of blood imbued with malign purpose. When you use an action to break the pearl, a blood elemental* is released as if you had cast the sanguine horror* spell, and the pearl's magic is lost. (* See *Deep Magic 12: Blood and Doom*.)

BLOOD-SOAKED HIDE

Armor (hide), very rare (requires attunement)

Blood-soaked hide armor is crafted from the tanned skins of humanoids, carefully preserved and layered. The armor is always smeared in tacky, semi-dried blood, no matter how carefully it's cleaned.

While wearing this armor, you gain a +1 bonus to AC, and you are immune to any effect that would cause you to lose hit points due to blood loss or ongoing wounds, such as the infernal wounds caused by a horned devil's tail or the necrotic damage caused by a sword of wounding.

As an action, you can transform into a flowing pool of thick blood for 1 minute, or until you use a bonus action to revert to normal. Any equipment you are wearing or carrying melds into your form or falls to the ground (your choice). Your statistics remain the same, but any magic items other than the blood-soaked hide cease to function. While in blood form, you can't speak, you are resistant to bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage, you can move through any opening as small as 1 inch wide without squeezing, and you can enter the space of other creatures and end your turn there.

A creature that starts its turn in your space must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or lose 3d6 hit points due to blood loss, and you regain a number of hit points equal to half the number of hit points the creature lost. Constructs and undead who aren't vampires are immune to this effect.

Once you assume blood form, you can't use that ability again until the next dawn.

BLOODTHIRSTY WEAPON

Weapon (piercing or slashing melee), rare (requires attunement)

This magic weapon bears long, branching channels inscribed into its blade or head, and it gives off a coppery scent. When you damage a creature with this weapon, it loses an additional 2d6 hit points from blood loss.

The weapon acquires a taste for the last creature it damaged. When you attack that creature with the weapon and miss, the target still loses 2d6 hit points due to blood loss as the weapon draws blood out of open wounds as it passes. If a creature uses an action and succeeds on a DC 15 Wisdom (Medicine) check or the wounded creature receives magical healing, the blade no longer has a taste for it.

Constructs and undead who aren't vampires are immune to the bleeding effects of the weapon.

MANTLE OF BLOOD VENGEANCE

Wondrous item, uncommon (requires attunement)

While you wear this red silk cloak, you can visit retribution on any creature that dares spill your blood. When you take piercing, slashing, or necrotic damage from a creature, you can use your reaction to turn your blood into a punishing spray. The creature that damaged you must make a DC 13 Dexterity saving throw, taking 2d10 acid damage on a failed save or half as much damage on a successful one.

The cloak has 3 charges. Each use of the cloak expends 1 charge. The cloak regains 1d3 expended charges daily at dawn.

TAERGASH'S TEAR

Wondrous item, legendary (requires attunement)

Taergash the Bloodpurger was the founder of the blood magic discipline, and though he is long dead, a sliver of his will and cruelty lives on. *Taergash's tear* is a teardrop-shaped ruby pendant suspended on a gold chain.

While wearing *Taergash's tear*, you gain the benefits of wearing a *periapt of wound closure*. The tear has 7 charges. It regains 1d4 + 3 expended charges daily at dawn but only if you have dealt piercing, slashing, or necrotic damage to a creature that has blood since the previous dawn.

Blood Call. As an action, you can expend 1 charge to target a creature you can see within 60 feet. If bloodsight is active, you can target a creature revealed to you by its blood, even if it has total cover from you. The creature's blood violently erupts from its body through its eyes, nose, mouth, or any similar orifice, or simply from its skin through burst blood vessels. The target must make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw, taking 4d8 necrotic damage and is stunned until the start of your next turn on a failed save or half as much damage and isn't stunned on a successful one. You regain a number of hit points equal to half the necrotic damage the target takes, but never more than the number of hit points it had before taking damage.

Bloodsight. As a bonus action, you can expend 2 charges to sense the presence of any creature that has blood within 60 feet of you. This lasts for 1 minute. You see a red, pulsing light illuminating the heart and veins that throbs brighter in time with the creature's heartbeat. This light is visible to you even in magical darkness or other heavily obscured areas and through solid objects. Creatures revealed to you in this way gain no benefit against you for being hidden or invisible.

Steal Vitality. As an action, you can drain blood from a willing creature, or one that is paralyzed or unconscious, with a touch. The creature takes 4d10 necrotic damage, and *Taergash's tear* regains 1 charge.

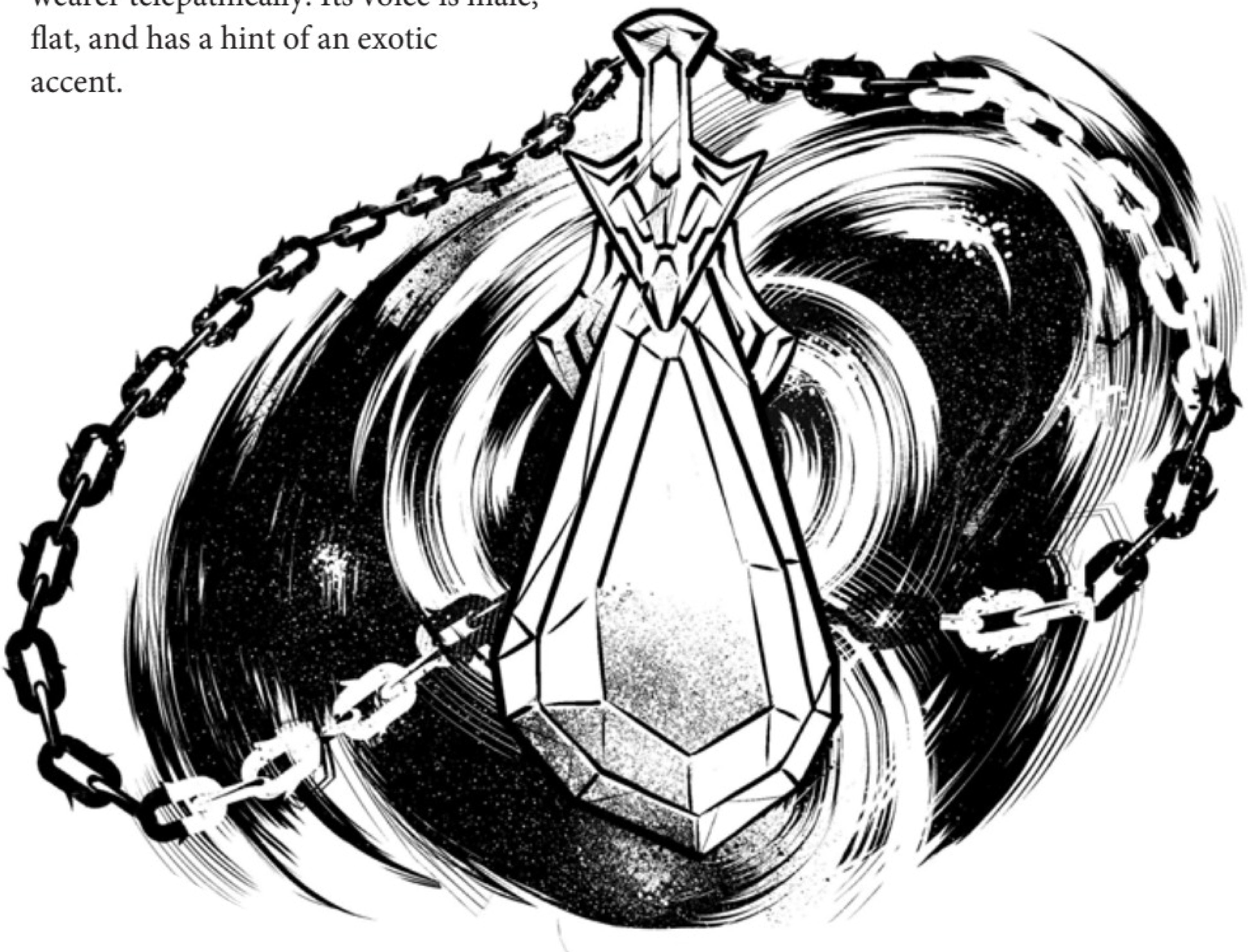
Sentience. *Taergash's tear* is a sentient neutral evil necklace with an Intelligence of 19, a Wisdom of 10, and a Charisma of 17. It has hearing and darkvision out to a range of 120 feet, and it gains the benefit of its own bloodsight property when activated.

The necklace can speak, read, and understand Common, Draconic, and Infernal and can communicate with its wearer telepathically. Its voice is male, flat, and has a hint of an exotic accent.

Personality. *Taergash's tear* is a haughty, arrogant thing that expects its wearer to treat it with respect.

The necklace's greatest desire is to preserve its own existence, and it latches onto a wearer it thinks might have the strength to assist it in that goal. The ruby pendant absorbed the blood of Taergash himself and pushes its wearer to seek out ways to preserve its life and to uncover any scrap of blood magic it learns about.

To that end, *Taergash's tear* can't abide being completely drained of charges. One of the quickest ways to push the sentient item into a conflict is to leave it at zero charges. If the wearer doesn't make an effort to recharge the item by using Steal Vitality, the necklace will simply take matters into its own hands and force the issue. If it gets the sense that its wearer won't help it meet its goals of eternal existence or continued recovery of lost blood magic, it will try to kill the wearer in its sleep, turning Blood Call and Steal Vitality against it.



SHADE: VOICES BEYOND DEATH

by Dan Dillon

Life leaves echoes in its wake, whether crumbled remnants of a bygone civilization, tales of heroes and gods that spawn new beliefs, or even the echo of an individual soul left behind to haunt the living world. The world of Midgard is no stranger to ghosts and specters that linger beyond death, but sometimes a person's passion, purpose, and will to live are so strong, their tie to the living world so unbreakable, that their memories create a vessel for their soul after their body dies. These people are called shades. Shades can arise from any living race.

There are rumors of darakhul or other undead leaving shades behind after destruction, but there are no reliable accounts of such a creature. It is more likely that an undead creature with strong enough will to become a shade becomes a shade of the race they were in true life.

Spirit and Flesh

A shade possesses a physical body that looks, acts, and feels similar to a living member of their original race, at least superficially. Shades must breathe, consume food and drink, and require shelter from adverse weather. Despite the functional similarities to a living body, a shade isn't composed of flesh and blood. Their bodies are a memory of who they once were, inhabited and quickened by the presence of their soul. Exhaustion, deprivation, and injury take their toll on a shade's body, disrupting their body's ability to maintain the connection to their soul. Food, drink, and air aren't necessary to nourish their bodies but merely to help them maintain the sense of being a living, breathing creature. Similarly, shades appear to sleep, but they do not require it.

The more injured or exhausted a shade, the less corporeal they appear. The colors of their body wash out to pale, desaturated tones, and light begins to pass through them. Blood from their wounds starts out as red and vibrant as any humanoid's, but closer to death, their wounds cease to bleed and seem to evaporate at the edges.

Living Memory

The strength of a shade's memory of themselves and their place in life is the core of their being. Newer shades are almost impossible to distinguish from their prior, fully-living selves. Like anything exposed to the gnawing ravages of time, however, memory fades. The older a shade gets, the memories that keep them tethered to the living world begin to fray. They might grow forgetful, losing track of where they are or what year it is. Their memories might drift together, causing them see people around them as figures from their past.

Many shades keep detailed memoires, tending to them with the same devotion that any living creature shows seeking out food and water. Shades can theoretically live forever, but in practice, the memories that tether them to life can't hold out indefinitely. Journals and other personal mementos help shades keep hold of themselves and allow them to last longer, sometimes for centuries.

Shades in Midgard

The largest known concentration of shades has arisen relatively recently in the conquered kingdom of Krakovar. The death that swept from the vampires to the south and their ghoulish allies that boiled up from the earth's crevices created the perfect conditions for shades to arise. Despite their greater frequency, even in the new annex of the greater Blood Kingdom, shades remain scattered except for one place. A tiny village in the Ostre Hills, Werghart, hosts a community of shades. It's remote and completely beneath the notice of the vampire ruling nobility because a scouting force destroyed it during the conquest. The shades found it not long after and set about to building themselves a new life. The Werghart shades are cut off, but they are determined and could make powerful allies in striking at the Blood Kingdom from within.

In the Southlands, shades are more common in Nuria Natal and in Siwal the City of Gardens. Siwali shades are great assets to the gravebinders who oversee the Necropolis, often becoming gravebinders themselves.

Social/Adventure

Because they can arise from any people, shades come from all corners of Midgard and from all walks of life. Station and wealth are no guarantee to help one linger on after the body's death either. It's not unheard of for a person to die only to rise as a shade with little understanding that anything changed. Some even hide or dispose of their original remains, sometimes suppressing or deeply denying

MEMENTO MORI

A shade's remembrance of their own life, their own self, is the key to their continued existence. When others honor their memory, a shade can draw sustenance and strength from it. Any token, gift, or even a work of art or poetry intended to honor the memory of the shade carries the giver or creator's memory and can sustain the shade.

Creating a true *memento mori* requires that the creator have a genuine desire to honor the shade. It might seem trivial for a shade's bard companion to compose poems or songs regularly, thus sustaining the shade, but such attempts fail. Memory is the key, and a creator who is in regular close contact with the shade draws more on that contact than on their own memory. A shade's traveling companion painting a portrait of the shade during their travels will never become a *memento mori*, but a handmade twine bracelet given by a villager after the shade saved their village might if the shade moves on. Above all, a true, empowered *memento mori* must carry meaning.

MEMENTO MORI

Wondrous item, uncommon
(requires attunement by the shade for whom it was offered)

As long as you have the *memento mori* in your possession, you don't require food, drink, or sleep. As an action, you can draw on all the stored memory at once, and you receive the effects of a *potion of heroism*. When the effect expires, the *memento mori* loses its magic.

the act at all, and resume their life with no disruption. Anyone could secretly, sometimes even to themselves, be a shade.

Some traveling shades leave their old lives behind, particularly those who were alone in life with no one to mourn them or fuel their memory. Such shades make up the majority of adventures. Other more established shades might set out on adventure to quest for the means to restore their true life or to protect loved ones from a threat. Krakovan shades engage in endless sabotage, harassment, and even outright warfare against the occupying forces of the Blood Kingdom.

Shade Traits

Your shade character has a collection of traits that arise from being a shade as well as a few drawn from life.

Ability Score Increase. Your Charisma score increases by 1, one other ability score of your choice increases by 1. Choose one ability score that is increased by your Living Origin (see below) or by one of its subraces. That ability score increases by 1.

Age. Shades appear as the age they were when they died. They potentially have no limit to their lifespan, but practically, ancient shades grow weary and lose their hold on their memories, fading away near 750 years old.

Alignment. Shades come from all walks of life but show a tendency toward neutrality. Shades that lack contact with other people grow more selfish over time and slip toward evil.

Size. Your size is determined by your Living Origin (see below).

Speed. Your speed is determined by your Living Origin (see below).

Darkvision. Your existence beyond death makes you at home in the dark. You can see in dim light within 60 feet of you as if it were bright light and in darkness as if it were dim light. You can't discern color in darkness, only shades of gray.

Ghostly Flesh. Starting at 3rd level, you can use your action to dissolve your physical body into the ephemeral stuff of spirits. You become translucent and devoid of color, and the air around you grows cold.

Your transformation lasts for 1 minute or until you end it as a bonus action. During it, you have a flying speed of 30 feet (hover) and resistance to bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage from nonmagical attacks that aren't made with silver weapons. You can also move through creatures and solid objects as if they were difficult terrain. If you end your turn inside an object, you take 1d10 force damage.

Once you use this trait, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.

Life Drain. When you damage a creature with an attack or a spell, you can choose to deal extra necrotic damage to the target equal to your level. If the creature's race matches your Living Origin, you gain temporary hit points equal to the necrotic damage dealt.

Once you use this trait, you can't use it again until you finish a short or long rest.

Spectral Resilience. You have resistance to necrotic and poison damage, and you have advantage on saving throws against poison and disease.

Undead Nature. You have two creature types: humanoid and undead. You can be affected by a game effect if it works on either of your creature types.

Game effects that raise a creature from the dead work on you as normal, but they return you to life as a shade. A *true resurrection* or *wish* spell can restore you to life as a fully living member of your original race.

Languages. You can speak, read, and write Common and one other language spoken by your Living Origin (see below).

Living Origin. As living echoes of who they once were, shades maintain some of the traits they bore in life. Choose another race as your living origin. This is the race you were in life. Your size and speed are those of your living origin.

Prominent Shades

Like any other group, shades have their luminaries and notables. These figures might serve as a mentor or point of contact for shade player characters, or as a means to tie other characters into ongoing events or even the distant secret history of Midgard.

KALADRIAN LADROSS LARENTIL

Centuries gone, the elves who once ruled over the face of Midgard fell into decline and left. Lifetimes of fighting against uprisings and infernal incursion—and the betrayal of their kin fled into Shadow—sent the elves with their magic, their armies, their empire, walking the Fey Roads back to the Summer Lands. Before the Great Retreat, in the waning centuries of the elven empire, Kaladrian Ladross Larentil lived and fought for the glory of his people in Liadmura in the Ironcrag Mountains.

Kaladrian was a general of armies, a fearsome warrior, and a wielder of the ancient elven high magic. He led his soldiers to conquest and glory and personally sacrificed defeated generals and would-be kings to Valeresh. It is said that he personally ended one hundred royal lines in the course of his devotion. It was during his time serving as advisor to the Eagle Emperor, in his fourth century of life, that an assassin's blade found his heart.

Kaladrian's shade rose from his cold blood wetting the marble of his chamber floor, just in time for him to witness the last crumbling days of the elves' power on Midgard. He is one of the few beings still walking the world who lived through those events, and it's a tragedy that he remembers almost nothing of it. He remained in Liadmura and continued to serve, but when it came time for the Great Retreat, he was left behind. There was no place for him in the Elflands in his state.

Now over six hundred years dead, Kaladrian is a fading echo of his former glory. He wanders the ruins of Liadmura, lost in the fading fragments of the memories struggling to hold his soul. Other memories of long-dead elves linger in the form of specters, ghosts, and banshees. The creatures occasionally attend their old general, but mostly leave him to his failing memory. Most of the time he mumbles and rambles, engaging in conversations had ages ago with comrades long gone. Fading and ghostly, it won't be long before his memories fail completely and his soul sinks into true, lasting death.

On rare occasions, however, his mind pulls together, and the fog clears. In these moments, he is every bit as powerful, charismatic, and dangerous as he was during the height of his life. What causes these moments of lucidity varies, ranging from an auspicious night of the year with certain celestial alignments to the glimpse of a trinket that stirs his fading core to bright life. When his mind clears, Kaladrian understands his state and station, and he can be reasoned with or grievously offended. During all other times, he's difficult to talk to but sometimes passes ancient secrets freely in a one-sided conversation.

KALADRIAN'S SHADE

Medium humanoid/undead (shade), Chaotic Neutral

Armor Class 14 (17 with *mage armor*)

Hit Points 210 (28d8 + 84)

Speed 30 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
10 (+0)	19 (+4)	16 (+3)	16 (+3)	15 (+2)	20 (+5)

Saving Throws Str +5, Wis +7, Cha +10

Skills History +8, Insight +7, Perception +7, Stealth +9

Damage Resistances necrotic, poison

Senses darkvision 60 ft., passive Perception 17

Languages Ankeshelian, Common, Dwarvish, Elvish

Challenge 14 (11,500 XP)

Insane. Kaladrian has advantage on saving throws against being charmed or frightened.

Special Equipment. Kaladrian carries a *rapier of wounding* and a *mithril pendant memento mori*.

Spectral Resilience. Kaladrian has advantage on saving throws against poison and disease.

Spellcasting. Kaladrian is a 10th-level spellcaster. His spellcasting ability score is Intelligence (spell save DC 16, +8 to hit with spell attacks). Kaladrian has the following wizard spells prepared:

Cantrips (at will): *blade ward, fire bolt, light, prestidigitation, shocking grasp*

1st level (4 slots): *guest of honor*, jump, mage armor*

2nd level (3 slots): *black swan storm*, blur, misty step*

3rd level (3 slots): *counterspell, haste, lightning bolt*

4th level (3 slots): *fire shield, shadowy retribution**

5th level (2 slots): *cone of cold, legend lore*

*Elven high magic spell (see *Midgard Heroes Handbook*)

Undead Nature. Kaladrian has two creature types, humanoid and undead. Any game effect that affects either of his creature types affects him.

ACTIONS

Multiattack. Kaladrian makes two weapon attacks. He can use Life Drain in place of one weapon attack.

Rapier of Wounding. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +9 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) piercing damage, and the target is wounded. Wounded creatures take 1d4 necrotic damage at the start of its turn for each wound, it can then make a DC 15 Constitution saving throw, ending all such wounds on a success. As an action, a successful DC 15 Wisdom (Medicine) check ends the wounds. Hit points lost to the rapier's damage can only be regained by finishing a short or long rest.

Longbow. *Ranged Weapon Attack*: +9 to hit, ranged 150/400 ft., one target. *Hit:* 8 (1d8 + 4) piercing damage.

Life Drain. Melee Spell Attack: +10 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (3d6) necrotic damage, and Kaladrian regains hit points equal to the necrotic damage taken.

Ghostly Flesh (1/Day). Kaladrian becomes ghostly and translucent for 1 minute. He gains a flying speed of 30 feet (hover), and has resistance to bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage made with nonmagical weapons that aren't silvered. He can move through objects and creatures as if they were difficult terrain, and if he stops inside an object he takes 5 (1d10) force damage. He can end the transformation early as a bonus action.

REACTIONS

Parry. Kaladrian adds 5 to his AC against one melee attack that would hit him. To do so, he must see the attacker and be wielding a melee weapon.

LEGENDARY ACTIONS

Kaladrian can take 3 legendary actions, choosing from the options below. Only one legendary action option can be used at a time and only at the end of another creature's turn. Kaladrian regains spent legendary actions at the start of its turn.

Attack. Kaladrian makes one weapon attack.

Evade. Kaladrian moves up to half his speed. This movement doesn't provoke opportunity attacks.

Cantrip. Kaladrian casts a cantrip.

Shades of Werghart

The following are some of the shades that adventurers might encounter in or around the village of Werghart in the Ostre Hills. In each case, add the following modifications to the suggested stat block:

- Charisma +1 and any two scores (only one of which can be Charisma) +1
- Creature type is both humanoid and undead
- Add the Ghostly Flesh (1/Day), Life Drain (1/Rest), and Spectral Resilience traits.

Veyla Gheren: Female Krakovan human shade. Veyla has the statistics of a **veteran**. Veyla appears to be a human woman in her mid-30s with dark skin and black hair in tight braids. She's deadpan and flat-eyed in times of stress or uncertainty but quick to smile among friends. She is the town master of Werghart and is doing her best to keep her people safe and to strike against the Blood Kingdom when she can. She died fighting against the ghoul incursions in Wallenbirg. If outsiders can earn her trust, she can offer work in the form of ambushing Blood Kingdom patrols or raids to obtain crucial supplies for the village.

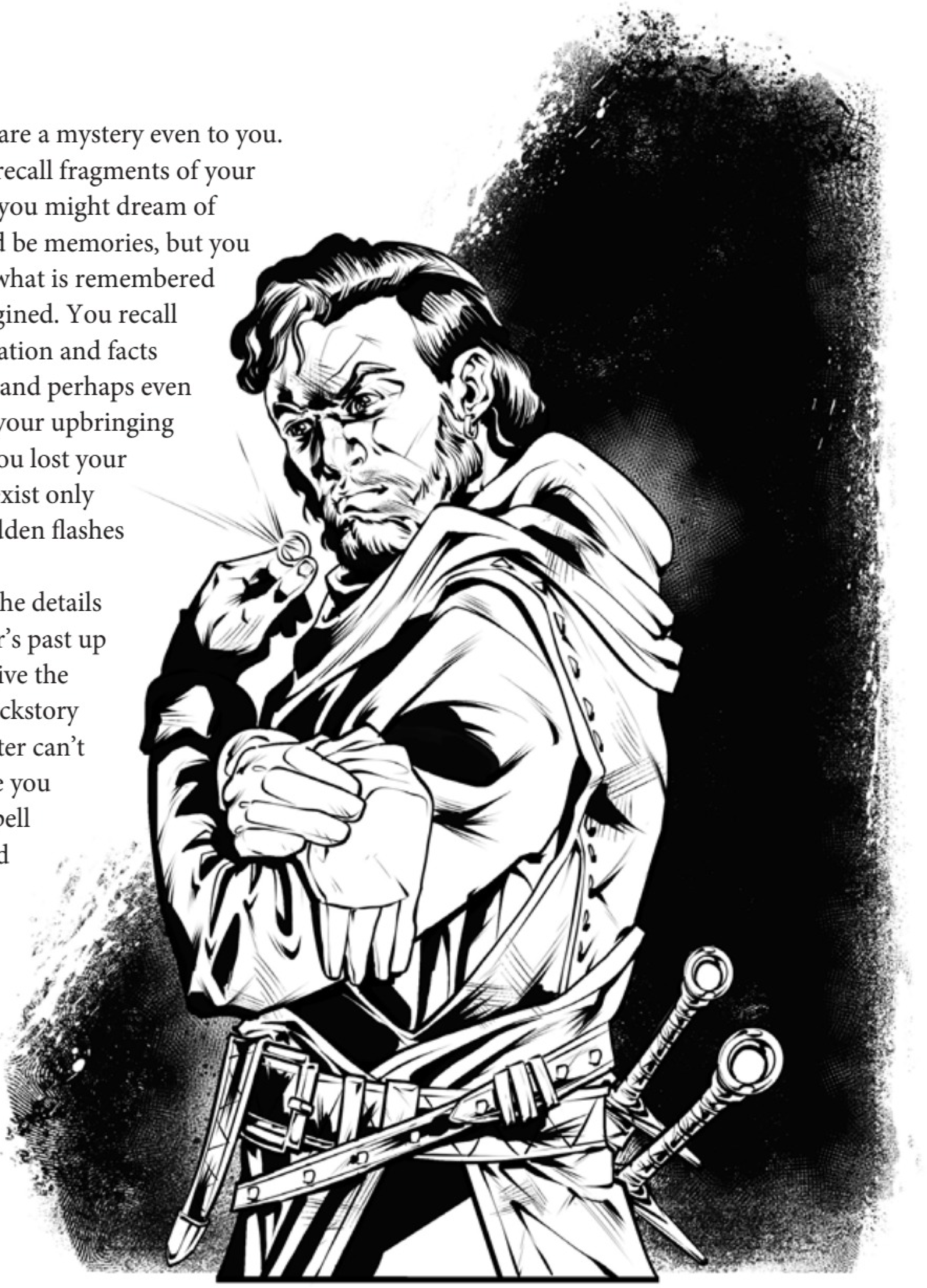
Gohtras Bloodstone: Male dwarf shade. Gohtras uses the statistics of a **priest**. He's a pale-skinned reaver dwarf priest of Wotan. He's missing his left eye and claims he put it out himself to see as his god sees. His hair and beard are auburn and plaited into several long braids adorned with bits of metal taken from fallen foes. Dour and grim, the dwarf is a staunch realist and advisor to Veyla. Gohtras was a visitor to the country, joining the battle at Krakova when he found himself in the midst of a siege. He's currently collecting stories of all the shades in Werghart and composing a saga to preserve their memory.

ENIGMA: A MYSTERIOUS BACKGROUND

by Hannah Rose

Your origins are a mystery even to you. You might recall fragments of your previous life, or you might dream of events that could be memories, but you can't be sure of what is remembered and what is imagined. You recall practical information and facts about the world and perhaps even your name, but your upbringing and life before you lost your memories now exist only in dreams or sudden flashes of familiarity.

You can leave the details of your character's past up to your GM or give the GM a specific backstory that your character can't remember. Were you the victim of a spell gone awry, or did



you voluntarily sacrifice your memories in exchange for power? Is your amnesia the result of a natural accident, or did you purposefully have your mind wiped in order to forget a memory you couldn't live with? Perhaps you have family or friends that are searching for you or enemies you can't even remember.

Skill Proficiencies: Deception, Survival

Tool Proficiencies: One type of artisan's tools or one type of musical instrument

Languages: One of your choice

Equipment: A mysterious trinket from your past life, a set of artisan's tools or a musical instrument (one of your choice), a set of common clothes, and a belt pouch containing 5 gp.

Feature: Unexpected Acquaintance

Even though you can't recall them, someone from your past will recognize you and offer to aid you—or to impede you. The person and their relationship to you depend on the truth of your backstory. They might be a childhood friend, a former rival, or even your child who's grown up with dreams of finding their missing parent. They may want you to return to your former life even if it means abandoning your current goals and companions.

Work with your GM to determine the details of this character and your history with them.

Suggested Characteristics

You may be bothered by your lack of memories and driven to recover them or reclaim the secrets of your past, or you can use your anonymity to your advantage.

d8	PERSONALITY TRAIT
1	I'm always humming a song, but I can't remember the words.
2	I love learning new things and meeting new people.
3	I want to prove my worth and have people know my name.
4	I don't like places that are crowded or noisy.
5	I'm mistrustful of mages and magic in general.
6	I like to keep everything tidy and organized so that I can find things easily.
7	Every night I record my day in a detailed journal.
8	I live in the present. The future will come as it may.

d6	IDEAL
1	Redemption. Whatever I did in the past, I'm determined to make the world a better place. (Good)
2	Independence. I'm beholden to no one, so I can do whatever I want. (Chaotic)
3	Cunning. Since I have no past, no one can use it to thwart my rise to power. (Evil)
4	Community. I believe in a just society that takes care of people in need. (Lawful)
5	Fairness. I judge others by who they are now, not by what they've done in the past. (Neutral)
6	Friendship. The people in my life now are more important than any ideal. (Any)

d6	BOND
1	I have dreams where I see a loved one's face, but I can't remember their name or who they are.
2	I wear a wedding ring, so I must have been married before I lost my memories.
3	My mentor raised me; they told me that I lost my memories in a terrible accident that killed my family.
4	I have an enemy who wants to kill me, but I don't know what I did to earn their hatred.
5	I know there's an important memory attached to the scar I bear on my body.
6	I can never repay the debt I owe to the person who cared for me after I lost my memories.

d6	BOND
1	I am jealous of those who have memories of a happy childhood.
2	I'm desperate for knowledge about my past, and I'll do anything to obtain that information.
3	I'm terrified of meeting someone from my past, so I avoid strangers as much as possible.
4	Only the present matters. I can't bring myself to care about the future.
5	I'm convinced that I was powerful and rich before I lost my memories—and I expect everyone to treat me accordingly.
6	Anyone who shows me pity is subjected to my biting scorn.

SKALDHOLM SHADOWSINGERS

by Sarah Madsen

The many skalds from Skaldholm form a loose network of informants for the Master of Thyles, but there are whispers of a secret organization within the schools: skalds that are as proficient in the art of espionage as they are in poetry and song. Known as shadowsingers, their primary medium is information and secrets, but they are known to slip a dagger between ribs when necessary. They report to the Master of Thyles himself, keeping him abreast of events (both public and private) in the Northlands and beyond.

Masters of insight and manipulation, the shadowsingers use every tool at their disposal in pursuit of their goals. Whether it's leveraging their position as skald to gain access to an exclusive event, singing the praises of their chosen courtiers to curry favor (or damning the reputation of those that displease them), or stealing into private royal chambers after a particularly rousing night of drunken revelry, they can convince their target to give up essential information, thank them for their patronage, and disappear into the shadows before anyone is the wiser.

Shadowsingers owe no loyalty to anyone but the Master of Thyles—not even to each other. Obviously, it's considered bad form to undermine a fellow shadowsinger (as they all serve the same master and pursue the same goal), but they swear no oath of allegiance to one another, and there's no distinct chain of command. While some shadowsingers find a second family within the ranks, others hold no love for the other skalds and feel no duty to aid anyone other than their personal allies. This can lead to clashes within the organization, and members that are too disruptive or antagonistic to their fellow shadowsingers find themselves shunned—or they simply vanish altogether.

Shadowsinger Goals

The shadowsingers have only one codified objective: find the answer to the Riddle of the Forgotten Thing. Whereas other skalds relay rumors they hear during their travels, the shadowsingers seek out knowledge, following the slightest lead, tugging on delicate threads of information until they find the source. Their quest takes them the far corners of the Northlands and even farther into the other kingdoms of Midgard in an effort to uncover what was lost.

Beyond this primary goal, shadowsingers desire knowledge above all else. The more buried a secret, the deeper a Shadowsinger delves to uncover it. Knowledge is power; it can cement empires or topple dynasties. Other than delivering vital knowledge to the Master of Thyles, what each Shadowsinger does with the information they discover is up to the individual—some use it for personal ends while others disseminate pertinent details to the masses—and there are factions within the organization that disagree with their role to play in that regard. Some whisper that this dispute will eventually erupt into a full-fledged schism while others claim the Master of Thyles will step in long before that happens.

Shadowsinger Ideals

All knowledge is worth having. Never let an opportunity to gather a secret or learn a story pass you by.

Make friends in high *and* low places. Nobility is only as powerful as its people.

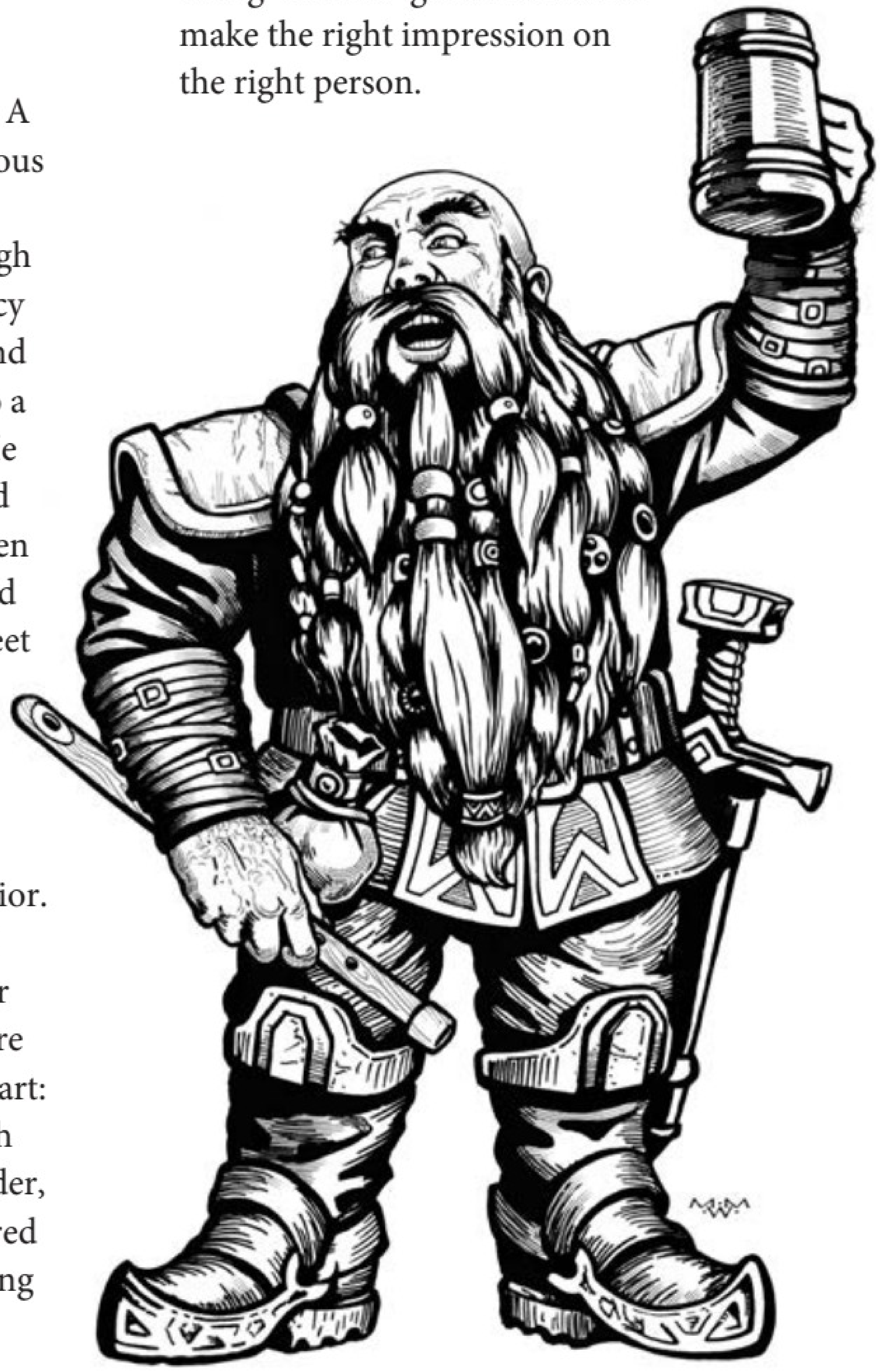
Your mind is your greatest weapon. Wield your wits, words, and art as ruthlessly as your blade.

Notable Individuals

Brand Thundershield (Chaotic Good): A stout dwarf storyteller, Brand is boisterous and amiable, making friends in every long hall in the north. His booming laugh and broad smile hide a ruthless efficiency however. With a few rounds of mead and a stirring tale, he can whip a tavern into a raucous celebration or a roiling mob. He chafes at the mistreatment of others and the inequality in the classes and will often be found slipping a large amount of gold into a beggar's bowl or entertaining street urchins with no reward other than their smile.

Fira Wolfsdottir (Neutral Good): A Northlander, Fira defied expectations and became a skald rather than a warrior. Showing great skill with both lute and blade as a young woman, she spent her time wandering and adventuring before returning to Skaldholm to perfect her art: spinning epic poetry and song. Though the shadowsingers have no official leader, Fira (now in her early forties) is honored and respected by many, often mentoring younger members and offering wisdom to those who seek her out. Her once-fiery temper has mellowed to a low burn but will nonetheless flare when her ideals (or her protégés) are threatened.

Jenner Mirin (Neutral Evil): Jenner is a tiefling thespian and a master at lies and subterfuge. They use their charm and wiles to weasel their way into the confidences—and beds—of commoners and nobles alike. Jenner's desire to find the answer to the Riddle is motivated purely by self-interest, and they happily claim any perks that come with being a beloved skald, accepting gifts of coin, ale, and adoration in equal measure. No altruism is found within Jenner—every action is calculated to reap the greatest reward, though occasionally that means doing "selfless" good in order to make the right impression on the right person.



Notable Locations

Baldur's Barrel: Within the heart of Skaldholm is a tavern, unremarkable by most standards. The placard above the door features a simple mug overflowing with mead and foam. Despite its benign appearance, the Barrel is owned by Oda, a former Shadowsinger, and is a safe haven for any skalds who need a meal, lodging, or a quiet place to broker a deal. Every night, a talented performer can be found on its small stage, enthralling the packed room, and every performer is given the lion's share of tips for the evening, as Oda is well aware of why her patrons frequent her tables.

The Retreat: A lodge nestled along the coast with beautiful views and clusters of relaxing hot springs, the Retreat has become a favored vacationing spot for scholars and nobles of Skaldholm alike. The perfect place to rub elbows with the elite, debate with master orators, and (of course) listen for any rumors, the Retreat features suites of rooms for rent (at exorbitant prices, naturally), delicious meals, and top-shelf drink to be enjoyed in their spacious dining hall or while lounging in the healing waters of the springs. The Retreat is spoken of by the lower classes with a mix of derision and longing—many consider it frivolous and wastefully overpriced, though few would turn down the chance to take advantage of its amenities.

The Skaldic Schools: There are numerous schools within Skaldholm that dedicate themselves to the study of the arts and scholarship. Each believes, of course, that their skalds are the most talented, their scholars the wisest, and their methods the truest, and the resulting feuds between them would fill a bard's book with legends and keep the washerwomen gossiping through the cold of winter. Shadowsingers often start their studies at one of the schools and are scouted by another shadowsinger who sees their potential. Once a student is marked as a possible recruit, the shadowsinger cultivates their new apprentice under the guise of legitimate mentorship within one of said schools. Only the teacher and the student—and possibly other shadowsingers—know the truth of what is being taught.

Character Options

The following options are available for shadowsingers PCs.

BARD COLLEGE: COLLEGE OF SHADOWS

Shadowsingers undergo careful training before they're sent out into the world. Skilled in both music and manipulation, they're the perfect blend of charm and cunning. The tricks they learn in their tutelage make them ideal for the subtle work of coaxing out secrets, entrancing audiences, and dazzling the minds of their chosen targets.

Bonus Proficiencies: Starting at 3rd level, you gain proficiency with three skills of your choice.

Mantle of Shadows: Starting at 3rd level, you can spend an action to twist the shadows around you for 1 minute or until your concentration ends. For the duration, you gain advantage on stealth checks and you gain the benefits of three-quarters cover as the shadows themselves obscure your passing.

Lover's Haste: Starting at 3rd level, you can dash as a bonus action while under the effects of Mantle of Shadows.

Cunning Insight: Starting at 6th level, you know exactly where to hit your enemies. You spend an action focusing on a target after which the target must make a Wisdom Saving Throw vs. your Spell Save DC. On a failed save, choose one of the following:

- You gain advantage on your next attack roll against the target.
- You gain knowledge of the target's damage vulnerabilities.

- You gain knowledge of the target's damage resistances and damage immunities.
- You gain knowledge of the target's condition immunities.
- You see through any illusions involving the target.

Shadowsinger: Starting at 14th level, you are a master at weaving stories and influencing the minds of your audience. With the power of one performance, you can make or break someone's reputation. You spend at least 1 minute performing, relaying a tale through song, poetry, play, or other medium. At the end of your performance, choose a number of humanoids who witnessed the entire performance, up to a number of 1 plus your Charisma modifier. Each target must succeed on a Wisdom saving throw vs. your spell save DC. On a failed save, the target(s) suffers one of the following:

- They believe the tale you told is truth and will tell others the tale as if it were truth, even under magical compulsion.
- They believe *someone* in the room knows their darkest secret, and they are at disadvantage on all Charisma, Wisdom, and Intelligence ability checks and saving throws for the next hour as they are distracted and overcome by paranoia.
- They become convinced that you (or one of your allies if you choose to sing the praises of another) are a fearsome opponent. For the next minute, they are afraid of you (or your ally). In addition, you (or your ally) gain advantage on all attack rolls against them for the duration.

Remove curse or *greater restoration* ends the effects of this feature. Once you use this feature, you may not use it again until you complete a short or long rest.

SHADOWSINGER APPRENTICE (BACKGROUND OPTION)

For those players interested in playing a shadowsinger, we suggest using the Entertainer background or the Criminal (Spy variant) and substituting the traits from the charts below as needed.

Shadowsingers are more than just entertainers, and their personality traits and motivations reflect that. Their demeanors are as varied and unpredictable as a northern storm, from calm and steady to tempestuous and boastful.

d8	PERSONALITY TRAIT
1	I'm warm and friendly; I've never met anyone I couldn't charm or encountered any conflict I couldn't talk my way out of.
2	I'm extremely competitive; I crave attention and praise and take it as a personal slight when others outmatch me.
3	Predictability and stagnation are the death of relevance, so I'm constantly seeking out new routines to add to my repertoire.
4	Subtlety is the key to manipulation; I like to leave my marks unaware of the damage I've done to their purse or their reputation until I'm safely out of town.
5	I have an insatiable curiosity and desire for knowledge, which often gets me in trouble.
6	I'm the best at what I do and cannot be convinced otherwise.
7	I enjoy verbal sparring. Matching wits with another is more exhilarating than any battle.
8	I assume personalities as easily as I change hats and become whatever is best suited for each situation. No one knows the true me, and I like it that way.

d6	IDEAL
1	**Equality** Knowledge is the great equalizer; the uniformed are easily oppressed and the ignorant easily manipulated. I do what I do to help those less fortunate than me. (**Good**)
2	**Loyalty** I answer to my betters. Any knowledge I gather is for them to use as they see fit. (**Lawful**)
3	**Change** Power structures are meant to be challenged, and with the knowledge I gather, I can shake society to its very foundation and make way for something new. (**Chaotic**)
4	**Personal Gain** I will search out the answer to the Riddle of the Forgotten Thing, but anything else I learn during my travels is fair game, and I'll gladly sell it to the highest bidder. (**Evil**)
5	**Knowledge** Information is neither good nor evil but is just another form of power. I am the only one I trust to wield it. (**Neutral**)
6	**Influence** The more sway I have within society, high or low, the easier it is to accomplish my goals without getting my own hands dirty. ***(Any)***

d6	BOND
1	I have an unwavering loyalty to the Master of Thyles and my fellow shadowsingers and will answer their call anytime, regardless of my own goals.
2	Intrigue and espionage are the world's greatest game, and I live to play.
3	My friends who stand by my side are more valuable than any secret.
4	The Riddle of the Forgotten Thing drives me in everything I do. I'm determined to be the one to find the answer and secure my place in history.
5	A fellow shadowsinger poached a valuable secret out from under me, and now I'm intent on seeing them brought low.
6	I missed a vital piece of information that led to the death of someone I loved. I'm terrified of making the same mistake again.

d6	FLAW
1	My ego is delicate and easily bruised, and I lash out at others when it's injured.
2	I sometimes get so wrapped up in the game that I miss the obvious, even when it's staring me in the face.
3	Being surrounded by skilled deceivers has left me distrustful of others. I find it hard to get close to anyone.
4	I'm single-minded when following a lead, plowing ahead despite the danger to myself or my friends.
5	I can't resist the opportunity to show off my skills and will rise to any challenge.
6	I was clumsy in an attempt to woo someone influential, and now they have it out for me. I'm probably not as charming as I think I am.

ON THE HUNT

by James J. Haeck

Bounty hunters are easy folk to understand. They may hunt for gold, for justice, or for vengeance, but no matter what their reasons for stalking their prey, the fact is that the hunt is all that matters to them. It consumes their thoughts and, all other pleasures of life, all its calming vices, are merely distractions to soothe their fevered minds.

There's a saying among mercenaries of the Crossroads. "Never trust a bounty hunter that smiles. You look into those teeth, and if you're lucky, you'll see the fangs of a hungry wolf, for a wolf hunts because it is the will of the world. Perun help you if you see the teeth of a man, for a man who kills for pleasure knows that good folk is just as fun to bleed as the bad."

The following new backgrounds and subclasses will help you create characters that live for the hunt.

New Backgrounds

Hunting dangerous prey is a calling only the reckless or barbarous pursue for long. As such, those who walk this blood-drenched path tend to come from backgrounds that imbue them with a need for vengeance, a hunger for justice, or a lust for the pure bloodthirsty thrill of the hunt.

FUGITIVE

You are on the run from the law for a grave crime. No common criminal, you were tried and imprisoned for an offense that has set the law permanently on your trail. Whether or not you actually committed this crime is hardly relevant; the constabulary want your head on a pike regardless.

What crime were you accused of? Did you really commit it, or were you a victim of circumstance, or were you framed? How long were you imprisoned before you escaped, and how long have you been fleeing the law since?

Skill Proficiencies: Deception, Stealth

Tool Proficiencies: Disguise kit, thieves' tools

Equipment: A disguise kit or thieves' tools, a prison brand or tattoo, a set of traveler's clothes, and a belt pouch containing 10 gp.

Feature: Self-Sufficient

You spent years fending for yourself in the cruelly indifferent wilderness, evading those that would see you dead. You leave no tracks while traveling alone. Additionally, you can find food and water for you and up to five other people by spending 2 hours during a long rest foraging, as long as the region you are in has fresh water, small game, and healthful vegetation available.

Suggested Characteristics

Some fugitives are legitimate cons, incarcerated for a grave crime, while others are innocent people that were either framed by an enemy or were simply in the wrong place at the wrong time. Regardless of why you ended up imprisoned, your time behind bars changed you, hardening your eyes and filling you with deep cynicism for humanity. Only true kindness can break down the walls that have risen around your heart.

Personality Traits, Ideals, Bonds, and Flaws

Choose these traits from the Criminal tables, or create your own.

RAID SURVIVOR

When a horde of centaurs descended upon a Karivi caravan, they left nothing but splintered timbers and tattered canvas in their wake. When the armies of the Dragon Empire marched on the Magdar Kingdoms, they took only what prisoners they could use as slaves and slaughtered the rest. Your home was no different, but when the raiders came, you somehow survived. You may have been orphaned. You may have been taken as a slave. You may have even been the sole survivor the raid, desperately hiding yourself underneath the still-warm corpse of another victim.

What matters is that you survived, no matter what you had to do. Work with your GM to determine who or what launched the raid, where the raid occurred, and who led the raiding party. Who did you lose in the raid, and how long ago did it occur? How did

you survive the attack? Did the raid fill you with the undying flames of vengeance? If so, are you content to simply take revenge on the leader of the raid, or do you wish to wipe out their entire company? Their entire race?

Skill Proficiencies: Stealth, Survival

Tool Proficiencies: One type of artisan's tools, healer's kit

Equipment: A set of artisan's tools (one of your choice), a healer's kit, a memento of home, a hunting knife, a set of traveler's clothes, and a belt pouch containing 5 gp.

Feature: A Mind for Faces

You remember the face of everyone you've ever met, especially those of folk who've wronged you. You instantly recognize any creature whose face you can see if you have seen that creature's face before, even if that creature is wearing a nonmagical disguise.

Suggested Characteristics

Some survivors chafe at losing all they had while others never had much to begin with; raiders care little for whether their victims are rich or poor, so long as they bleed. Most raid survivors seek vengeance against those who took everything from them and dedicate their lives to hunting and killing the raiders.

Personality Traits, Ideals, Bonds, and Flaws

Choose these traits from the Outlander tables, or create your own.

TROPHY HUNTER

You hunt the mightiest beasts in the harshest environments, claiming their pelts as trophies and returning them to civilization for a profit or to decorate your lavish abode. You likely were set on this path since birth, following your parents on safaris and learning from their actions, but you may have instead come to this path as an adult after being swept away by the thrill of dominating the natural world.

Many big game hunters pursue their quarry purely for pleasure, as a calming avocation, but others sell their skills to the highest bidder in order to amass wealth and reputation as a trophy hunter.

Skill Proficiencies: Nature, Survival

Tool Proficiencies: Leatherworker's tools, vehicles (land)

Equipment: A donkey or mule with bit and bridle, a set of cold weather or warm weather clothes, and a belt pouch containing 5 gp.

d8	PERSONALITY TRAIT
1	Nothing gets my blood pumping like stalking a wild animal.
2	I like things *big*! Trophies, big! Food, big! Money, houses, weapons, possessions, I want 'em big, *big, BIG*!
3	When hunting, it's almost as if I become a different person. Focused. Confident. Ruthless.
4	The only way to kill a beast is to be patient and find the perfect moment to strike. The same is true for all the important things in life.
5	Showering is for novices. I know that to catch my smelly, filthy prey, I must smell like them to throw off their scent.
6	I only eat raw meat. It gets me more in tune with my prey.
7	I'm a connoisseur of killing implements; I only use the best, because *I* am the best.
8	The sight of a beast inspires in me terrible fury. I want nothing more than to slaughter every last one of them!

Feature: Shelter from the Storm

You have spent years hunting in the harshest environments of the world and have seen tents blown away by gales, food stolen by hungry bears, and equipment destroyed by the elements. While traveling in the wilderness, you can find a natural location suitable to make camp by spending 1 hour searching. This location provides cover from the elements and is in some way naturally defensible, at your GM's discretion.

Suggested Characteristics

Most trophy hunters come from an affluent background, often using their parents' wealth to fund their first hunting trips. They are often skilled hobbyists and find strange relaxation in the tension of the hunt and revel in the glory of a kill. You may find great personal joy in hunting, or you do it for the adoration of peers or simply to make gold by selling pelts and ivory, like a common poacher.

d6	IDEAL
1	**Ambition**. It is my divine calling to become better than my rivals by any means necessary. (Chaotic)
2	**Altruism**. I hunt only to protect those who cannot protect themselves. (Good)
3	**Determination**. No matter what the laws say, I *will* kill that beast! (Chaotic)
4	**Cruelty**. My prey lives only for my pleasure. It will die exactly as quickly or as slowly as I desire. (Evil)
5	**Sport**. We're just here to have fun. Don't get your knickers in a twist! (Neutral)
6	**Family**. I follow in my family's footsteps. I will not tarnish their legacy. (Any)

d6	BOND
1	I like hunting because I like feeling big and powerful.
2	I hunt because my father thinks I'm a worthless runt. I need to make him proud.
3	I was mauled by a beast on my first hunting trip. I've spent my life searching for that monster.
4	The first time I drew blood, something awoke within me. Every hunt is a search for the original ecstasy of blood.
5	My hunting companions used to laugh at me behind their backs. They aren't laughing anymore.
6	A close friend funded my first hunting expedition. I am forever in their debt.

d6	FLAW
1	I'm actually a sham. All of my trophies were bagged by someone else. I just followed along and watched.
2	I'm terrified of anything larger than myself.
3	I can't express anger without shooting something.
4	I need money. I don't care how much or how little I have, I need more. And I would do anything to get it.
5	I am obsessed with beauty in animals, art, and people... and I don't take no for an answer.
6	I don't trust my hunting partners, those feckless, glory-stealing freeloaders!

New Subclasses

Bounty hunters are too diverse a group to be captured solely in a single subclass. Some are brutes, choosing the life of the Champion (fighter) while other clever mercenary leaders prefer more tactical maneuvers. Many emulate the Hunter (ranger) and train tirelessly in order to track their quarries to the ends of the earth. Others still are wizards that study the School of Divination to scry upon their targets and strike from afar.

This article presents two new subclasses: the College of Criminology, which encourages bards to gather information to identify the motives and weaknesses of their criminal quarries, and the Oath of Justice, which empowers paladins to overwhelm and incapacitate their foes in the name of the law.

COLLEGE OF CRIMINOLOGY (BARD)

Bards pick up all sorts of information as they travel the land. Some bards focus on a certain type of information, like epic poetry, love ballads, or bawdy drinking songs. Others, however, turn to the shadowy occupation of criminology. These bards use their knack for gathering information to learn about criminals and vigilantes, their tactics, and their weaknesses. Some criminologists work with agents of the law to catch criminals, but shadier members of this college use their dark knowledge to emulate the malefactors they have studied for so long.

Bonus Proficiencies

When you join the College of Criminology at 3rd level, you gain proficiency in the Insight skill and your choice of two of Acrobatics, Deception, Investigation Performance, Sleight of Hand, and Stealth.

Quick Read

At 3rd level, your knowledge of underhanded tactics allows you to gain insight into your foes' strategies. As a bonus action, you can spend a Bardic Inspiration die to make a Wisdom (Insight) check against one creature you can see within 30 feet contested by its Charisma (Deception) check; you can roll the Bardic Inspiration die and add it to the result of your check. You have disadvantage on your check if the target is not a humanoid, and the check automatically fails against creatures with an Intelligence score of 3 or lower.
On a success, you gain one of the following benefits:

- The target has disadvantage on attack rolls against you for 1 minute.
- You have advantage on saving throws against the target's spells and magical effects for 1 minute.
- You have advantage on attack rolls against the target for 1 minute.

Bardic Instinct

Starting at 6th level, you can extend your knowledge of criminal behavior to your companions. When a creature that has a Bardic Inspiration die you gave them is damaged by a hostile creature's attack, it can use its reaction to roll the Bardic Inspiration die and reduce the damage by twice the number rolled.

If this reduces the damage of the attack to 0, the creature you inspired can make a single melee attack against its attacker as part of the same reaction.

Hot Pursuit

Starting at 14th level, when a creature fails a saving throw against one of your bard spells, you can designate it as your mark for 24 hours. You know the direction to your mark at all times unless it is within an *antimagic field*, it is protected by an effect that prevents scrying such as *nondetection*, or there is a barrier of lead at least 1 inch thick between you.

Additionally, whenever your mark makes an attack roll or you make a saving throw against one of its spells or effects, you can spend a Bardic Inspiration die to roll it and add or subtract the result from the roll. You can choose to do so after the d20 is rolled but before the GM reveals the outcome of the roll.

OATH OF JUSTICE (PALADIN)

The Oath of Justice is a commitment not the tenets of good or evil but a holy vow sworn to uphold the laws of a nation, a city, or even of a tiny village. When lawlessness threatens the peace, those who swear to uphold the Oath of Justice intervene to maintain order, for if order falls to lawlessness, it is only a matter of time before all of civilization collapses into anarchy.

While many young paladins take this oath to protect their country and the people close to them from criminals, some older adherents to this oath know that what is just is not necessarily what is right.

Tenets of Justice

All paladins of justice uphold the law in some capacity, but their oath differs depending on their station. A paladin that serves a queen upholds slightly different tenets than one that serves a small town.

Uphold the Law. The law represents the triumph of civilization versus savagery. It must be preserved at all costs.

Punishment Fits the Crime. The severity of justice acts in equal measure to the severity of a wrongdoer's transgressions.

Oath Spells

You gain spells at the paladin levels listed.

LEVEL	SPELLS
3rd	*color spray, guiding bolt*
5th	*locate object, zone of truth*
9th	*lightning bolt, slow*
13th	*locate creature, locate object*
17th	*arcane hand, hold monster*

Channel Divinity

When you take this oath at 3rd level, you gain the following two Channel Divinity options.

Tether of Righteousness. You can use your Channel Divinity to bind your target to you. As an action, you extend a line of energy toward a creature you can see within 30 feet of you. That creature must succeed on a Dexterity saving throw. On a failure, it is tethered and cannot move more than 30 feet away from you. While tethered, the target takes lightning damage at the end of each of its turns equal to your Charisma modifier. You can use your action to make a Strength check opposed by the tethered creature's Strength check; on a success, you can pull it up to 15 feet toward you in a straight line.

As an action, the tethered creature can attempt to make a Strength check against your spell save DC. On a success, it breaks the tether.

Justicar's Celerity. You can use your Channel Divinity to respond to danger with lightning speed. When a creature that you can see is attacked, you can move up to your speed as a reaction. If you end your movement adjacent to the attacker, you can make a single melee attack against it as part of this reaction. If you end your movement adjacent to the target of the attack, you can become the target of the attack as part of this reaction. You can use this feature after you see the attacker's attack roll, but before the GM says if it hits or misses.

Disciplined Pursuant

At 7th level, you have bent the laws of magic to parallel the laws of your civilization. When you reduce a creature to 0 hit points with a spell, you can knock the creature out instead of killing it. The creature falls unconscious and is stable.

Aura of Control

At 7th level, all creatures within 10 feet of you must spend 1 extra foot of movement for each foot they move. If a creature ends its turn in this area, it must succeed on a Wisdom saving throw or fall prone. Creatures that are immune to being frightened are immune to this aura.

At 18th level, the range of this aura extends to 30 feet.

Shackles of Light

Starting at 15th level, once per turn when you deal radiant damage to a creature, it must make a Constitution saving throw. On a failure, it is restrained until the end of its next turn.

Avatar of Perfect Order

At 20th level, you can take on the appearance of justice itself. As an action, you become wreathed in a garment of cold light. For 1 minute, you benefit from the following effects:

- You are immune to bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing damage.
- You can use your Justicar's Celerity feature without expending a use of Channel Divinity.
- When a creature you can see takes the Attack or Cast a Spell action, you can use your reaction to force it to make a Wisdom saving throw. On a failure, it must take a different action of your choice instead.

Once you use this feature, you can't use it again until you finish a long rest.

THE ORDER OF THE EBON STAR

by Kelly Pawlik

When the Ghoul Imperium lent aid to the vampires of Morgau and Doresh, filing out of tunnels beneath Tannenbirg Castle and assisting them in the taking of Krakova, now Krakovar, they did so at the directive of their Emperor Nicoforus the Pale, and they did so without question. When the emperor sent his forces northeast to Wallenbirg, they went without hesitation. And as a result, the taking of Krakova was swift. Darakhul forces rejoiced in their success, and the emperor, through his alliance with the vampires, was the most fruitful of all.

It is said all ghouls are faithful to their emperor, but even among creatures that can see in the dark, some details are missed, some actions left unseen. While the Ghoul Imperium appeared stronger and more successful than ever, some of the forces instrumental in the shift of power, including Hesstia Daarmirve, began to question the emperor's concern for them and became uneasy with the vampire alliance. And so was born the Order of the Ebon Star.

Hesstia Daarmirve

The dragonborn-darakhul assassin, Hesstia Daarmirve, led a small, stealthy contingent of cutthroats from the ghouls' dark empire into the bowels of Tannenbirg Castle. From this staging area, the darakhul swiftly slaughtered the castle's unsuspecting guards while taking few losses. This gained Hesstia the notice of her superiors and the task of leading the ghoul vanguard into Wallenbirg. Once again, her initial assault left little for the Knights Incorporeal to mop up when the time for the full assault came.

In the weeks following the taking of Krakova, Hesstia began to resent her ruler. Despite all their efforts, Hesstia and her surviving companions saw little reward, yet rumor surfaced of Emperor Nicoforus the Pale being surrounded by more bodies than ever to feast on. It seemed promises that had been made were being delivered, but Hesstia felt uneasy and, for the first time, questioned her ruler.

Shortly after this, while walking above ground just before the first rays of the sun appeared on the horizon, Hesstia had a vision. A woman surrounded by swirling stars as dark as the darkest sky can be spoke to her and offered her the chance to walk unhindered by day. The being promised aid in exchange for Hesstia taking up her mantle. Both questioning her ruler and awed at the power of the being who granted the sleepless darakhul a vision, Hesstia agreed without hesitation.

Born a dragonkin and turned shortly after puberty, Hesstia is a smart, fierce individual who showed much promise in her days with the Ghoul Imperium. Her height and commanding presence give her an air of authority, and her divine connection to one who grants her followers freedom from their daylight sensitivity has made her a leader to those who seek change. Until embracing her vision, Hesstia was unwaveringly loyal to the Imperium; her dedication to the Queen of Night and Magic is steadfast.

Hesstia is an **assassin** with the following adjustments:

- Darkvision 60 ft.
- Damage Resistance: necrotic
- Damage Immunity: poison
- Condition Immunities: charmed, exhaustion, poisoned
- Skill: Persuasion +3

The Order's Organization

Comprised entirely of darakhul defectors, the order is hunted as much as it hunts, and for this reason, it exists in small mobile cells, remaining at one location no more than a few days or weeks before moving on.

Units are usually comprised of: an **iron ghoul** (see *Tome of Beasts*); a **mage***; and 10 **Imperial ghouls** (see *Tome of Beasts*).

Specialized groups of the order exist and can be comprised of **darakhul shadowmancers** (see *Creature Codex*), **knights***, **blood mages** (see *Creature Codex*)*, and **black knight commanders** (see *Tome of Beasts*)*.

Other members of The Order work away from their fellows, scouting out potential ways to strike at the vampires and the Ghoul Imperium. These individuals may enact their plans on their own, call on a unit to assist them, or work with groups outside of the order. In the case of the latter, the group may or may not be aware of the order's existence or assistance. Sometimes multiple units of the order converge, assisting each other with mission of significant import.

*Add Hesstia's adjustment

Worship of Sarastra

Members of the Order of the Ebon Star follow the Queen of Night and Magic, who aids in their fight against the ghouls and vampires who wish to push them into servitude. Shrines to Sarastra can be found in areas the order has laid roots for a time, and each member of the order wears a crest of an ebon star to denote their dedication.

The order has an uneasy alliance with the churches of Sarastra. Most of her other followers have difficulty understanding what their queen wishes from these undead servitors and, while they have little desire to question their fickle goddess's whims, they also wish to protect their own lives. For this reason, the order remains insular, keeping to itself and avoiding contact with outside parties when possible. Churches of Sarastra that have lent aid to the order have done so only briefly, sheltering those who are too wounded to continue their travels.

Outside Relationships

Viewed as traitors by other undead and feared by the living, the Order of the Ebon Star has few allies, and those they do have are tenuous.

Darakhul defectors are quickly replaced in the Ghoul Imperium, so those defecting do not reduce the emperor's numbers, but their treacherous actions upset the Imperium. Most ghouls and vampires attack the order on sight, and few parlay even briefly with these deserters. The order, eager to survive, has no love lost for allies of Emperor Nicoforus the Pale.

The reaver dwarves based at Skogarholm and Jozht wish to see their own territory expand and the undead fall, but they have little interest in working with other undead to accomplish this. The order gives the dwarves a wide berth, and in return, the dwarves generally avoid killing those undead bearing the dark eight-pointed star.

Queen Urzula views the order as an enemy on since most of its forces played a part in her defeat. She has been unwilling to even parlay with members, and an alliance with her and her people seems impossible.

Adventuring parties eager to fight back the undead have managed to work with cells of the order with varying degrees of success. Those groups wishing to destroy all undead or who attempt to trick members of the order into an alliance before attacking them find the order unamenable to such activities. Those who are willing to use less conventional means of striking out at the vampires and darakhul in the region find the Queen of Night and Magic's undead followers eager to assist.

Reclaiming Their Rights

The Order of the Ebon Star focuses much of their wrath on vampires: the undead creatures who live so easily on the surface, the foul beasts who convinced their kind to join forces with them. While the darakhul continued to serve the emperor, their undead partners began to live a life of opulence. The order can see the battles they faced were fought for the vampires alone, and any benefits the darakhul have gained have been negligible in comparison and often at great expense. The vampires have corrupted the Imperium; their forces must be dwindled, and Emperor Nicoforus the Pale must be removed from his seat of power.

Growing Forces

Swaying the minds of the subservient darakhul is no easy task, but some members of the order endeavor to do just that. Infiltrating the Imperium they were once a part of, these brave undead seek out any cracks they can widen, separating individuals from the misled mass.

Given the difficulty of this task, members of the order have been known to turn to creation in order to reinforce their numbers. This is not lightly done and must be done carefully so as to indoctrinate those who are to be turned to their cause. Often, these new recruits are either vampire-hunting experts or victims of undead that follow the emperor's rule—or sometimes both.

The most notable of these recruits is Tyrik Benion, a **graveslayer** (see *Creature Codex*; add Hesstia's alterations) who at a young age found his parents brutally murdered by a hungry vampire. Vowing vengeance, Tyrik devoted his life to the destruction of these undead abominations. After numerous foiled attempts to kill the vampire and with a wake of dead innocents behind him, Tyrik was approached by Hesstia herself. The persuasive dragonkin ghoul offered the dispirited dwarf a chance to continue his crusade against his hated vampire foes. Forever.

CHARRED STAR

Wondrous item, rare

These fist-sized blackened rosewood stars are worn by many officers of the Order of the Ebon Star. While held in the hand, you can use a *charred star* to detect the approximate distance and direction of any shadow roads within 1 mile. As an action, you can use a *charred star* to transport yourself and up to ten other creatures of medium size or smaller onto a shadow road within 10 feet of you. Once you have returned to the mortal world from the shadow realm, you must finish a long rest before using a *charred star* in this fashion again.

SARASTRAN GHOULS (VARIANT: +0 CR)

The eyes of darakhul who have truly embraced the worship of the Queen of Night and Magic darken to near black with white motes that seem to swirl and drift across their pupils. They find they no longer suffer from the sunlight sensitivity plaguing others of their kind.

The Code of the Order

Members of the Order of the Ebon Star are tricky and deceitful. Forced for much of their existence to live in the shadows, they now find much solace in their worship of the Queen of Night and Magic. Their tenets include the following affirmations:

- Vampire-kind has infected the Ghoul Imperium. We save what we can and cleanse what we must.
- The Queen of Night and Magic guides us. With her aid we see what our fellows cannot.
- Enemies of our enemies can be allies, but we must always be ready for their inevitable betrayal.
- There is a new way, if only one is willing to open their eyes and embrace the queen.

New Rogue Subclass

Killing is an art. May the gods look favorably on your offering.

HERALD OF THE EBON STAR

Through a mixture of training and personal experience, you have mastered the art of killing not only vampires but any undead who fear the sun's light. Some heralds of the ebon star see themselves as righteous freedom fighters, battling to receive what they feel is their due, but just as many are

simple thugs and thrill seekers, vying to pit themselves against worthy foes. Regardless of their motivations, they are largely viewed as heretics by their own people and with tentative suspicion by most others.

Heraldic Proficiencies: When you choose this archetype at 3rd level, you gain proficiency with lances, longbows, and shields. You also gain proficiency in either History or Religion.

Faith's Weapon: Also at 3rd level, you can wield a longsword as a finesse weapon, provided that you have either a shield or nothing heavier than a light weapon in your other hand. When you use a longsword to make a sneak attack against a vampire, you use d8s as your sneak attack damage dice. For instance, if a 5th-level herald of the ebon star wielding a longsword makes a sneak attack against a vampire, they deal an extra 3d8 slashing damage rather than the extra 3d6 slashing damage they would deal to a non-vampire.

Gloam Runner: When you reach 9th level, you can shroud yourself in shadows to misdirect those that would strike as you reposition yourself. As a bonus action, when you move out of a creature's reach, it has disadvantage on opportunity attacks against you as nearby shadows gather around your form and mask your motion. If you take the Dash or Disengage actions while using this ability, all creatures that make opportunity attacks against you have disadvantage on their attack rolls.

Black Star Blazon: At 13th level, when a creature strikes you with a critical hit, you can make a Constitution saving throw with a DC equal to 15 or half of the damage dealt, whichever number is higher. If you succeed on the saving throw, the attack against you is resolved as a normal hit rather than as a critical hit. In addition, you can make a Constitution saving throw in place of any other saving throw. You must finish a short or long rest before using this ability in this fashion again. This ability does not function in areas of complete daylight or where there are no shadows present.

Black Sun Blade: Starting at 17th level, when you are wielding a longsword, shortsword, or dagger, you can use your bonus action to wreath its blade in coiling tendrils of black flame. A blade wreathed in such a fashion is treated as a *sun blade* with the following exceptions. The blade does not emit bright light; instead it oozes a seeping gloom that creates a magical darkness in a 15-foot radius and dim light for an additional 15 feet. While the black flames persist, you can use an action to expand or reduce the area of darkness and dim light by 5 feet each, to a maximum of 30 feet each or a minimum of 10 feet each. The wielder of the black sun blade can see through the magical darkness it creates. The black flames cease to exist when the wielder wills them to or when the *black sun blade* is not being wielded in hand. A herald of the ebon star can create only one *black sun blade* at a time; if a new one is created, the previous effect ends immediately.

New Background

We've all got a past.

GHOUL IMPERIUM DESERTER

You have served your emperor and his officers dutifully, and it has brought you nothing. The rewards you have been promised—a herd of fattened manlings for feasting upon, a troupe of skeletons to serve your needs, and possibly a zombie or three for light security—all of these things and more have failed to materialize in whole or in part, and now you want what you feel is coming to you, even if you have to live among the feeble mortals of the surface lands to get it.

While some Ghoul Imperium deserters are found amongst vampires and their dhampir progeny, most frequently they are darakhul ghouls, many of whom are veterans of the constant conflicts with the ghoul emperor's many enemies, both above and below the surface of the world. You are viewed with suspicion if not outright hostility by the majority of the people you meet.

Skill Proficiencies: Intimidation, Performance

Tool Proficiencies: One gaming set of your choice

Language: Umbral

Equipment: a bag of caltrops, a hunting trap, a gaming set of your choice, a humanoid skull or femur, and a pouch with 25 gp

Feature: Alter Ego

You have a second identity that includes documentation, established acquaintances, and disguises that allow you to assume this persona. Additionally, you have a safehouse in one of the cities or towns of the Crossroads region. This safehouse is of average quality and is registered in the name of your alter ego.

Suggested Characteristics

While benevolence isn't completely unknown to the darakhul of the Ghoul Imperium, deserters are often marked with a streak of selfishness or unbridled self-interest. Often their ideals and bonds are shaped by the type of company they keep.

d8	PERSONALITY TRAIT
1	I will do whatever it takes, barring personal harm, to get what I want.
2	Caution is as necessary on the battlefield as in the bargaining chamber.
3	If no one saw this, it didn't happen.
4	If you have what I want, I will take it.
5	Trickery and persuasion are the same thing.
6	I am owed a blood debt that will be repaid with interest.
7	Happiness is as pointless as sorrow.
8	Killing should be done in the bloodiest fashion possible.

D6	IDEAL
1	**Power**. Those weaker than myself deserve neither mercy nor pity. (Evil)
2	**Control**. I know what is best. Kneel and do my bidding. (Law)
3	**Selfishness**. If I get what I desire, there may be some little thing left for you. (Evil)
4	**Benevolence**. We were free creatures in life. It does not have to be different in un-life. (Good)
5	**Anarchy**. If everyone rises up as one, they cannot strike at all of us. (Chaos)
6	**Fairness**. We toil for our masters, and what does it gain us? When do we see reward for our efforts? (Neutral)

d6	BOND
1	My standard bearer has been with me through hell and high water. I will see to it that he makes it through this too.
2	I take a fingertip from each dwarf I slay and string them on a thong I wear around my neck.
3	After I fell in battle near Triolo, my husband remarried and took our children to live with his new wife. I will find and recover my children while punishing his betrayal of my memory.
4	This rose engraved blade has seen my family's fortunes fall. It will now see them rise again in eternal life.
5	The gnomes of Neimheim took me in when I was near my second death. I will protect gnomes wherever I find them.
6	I was branded a traitor and driven into exile. I will return in force and bring glory to my name.

d6	FLAW
1	I can only stomach meat that is cut from living prey.
2	When I am telling the truth, it seems like I am lying.
3	I cannot help but to be deceitful when I am speaking to an authority figure.
4	My tone is loud and aggressive, even when I am feeling calm.
5	I cannot read my mother tongue, but I will not admit this fact.
6	When living people are near me, I lick my lips and salivate profusely.

RAYS OF THE UNDYING SUN

by Dan Dillon

> *They don't trust us, and I can't blame them. It hardly matters. We will stand against the darkness gathering to swallow them all, even if they hate and curse us as we do.*
> —Sir Janush Hermass, Commander of the Order of the Undying Sun, Zobeck

While Khors's position in the pantheon of central Midgard has waned in recent years, the sun god's worship is far from vanished. The Magdar Kingdom is the stalwart seat of Khors's faithful, and he enjoys a robust following there.

Undoubtedly, the bastion of faith maintaining the spark of Khors's light is the Order of the Undying Sun. Within the Magdar Kingdom, they are a formidable fighting force whose reputation spreads as far as the sun's rays. Queen Dorytta of the Magdar Kingdom counts the order's grand marshall as one of her closest advisors, affording the order massive prestige and influence.

The Order of the Undying Sun also carries the light of Khors beyond the Magdar Kingdom's borders and is the main reason Khors's worship still persists in the Crossroads despite Rava displacing him as head of the pantheon. Though the order maintains a garrison in Zobeck, they struggle against a dark reputation of having been on the losing side of the revolt against family Stross. The order also has a presence in Canton Grisal and boasts many dwarves among its ranks. Characters who join the Order of the Undying Sun and prove their devotion to Khors might be part of elite fighting regiments, paladins sworn to the Oath of Radiance (see *Midgard Heroes Handbook*), or even champions gifted with powerful magic items kept by Khors's faithful.

Characters of almost any race can find solace within the ranks of the order, save for those with ties to undeath and the power of shadow. Darakhul, dhampir, and shadow fey, for instance, would likely (and prudently) want nothing to do with the order. Should such a character pursue a non-hostile relationship with the order, they're in for a hard road but not an impossible one. The order's history holds more than one tale of a creature that would seemingly be a bitter enemy instead proving to be a stalwart friend and fierce ally in battle.

Subclass Options

The Order of the Undying Sun holds several elite military regiments, some of which boast specialized subclasses. These are most common within the Magdar Kingdom but aren't completely exclusive to that region. Anywhere the order persists, these characters can arise.

There are also variations on these classes that exist in other parts of the world, attached to other faiths. Lada in the Crossroads sometimes boasts followers who follow similar skill sets. Aten, the harsh and unforgiving god of the pitiless sun in the Southlands, likewise has warriors who embody searing light and fervor.

FIGHTER: SUNSET PIKEMAN

You are (or were) a member of the Sunset Regiment (so named because its soldiers' service ends rather than being a permanent occupation), trained in their pike and formation skills. You know that next to Khors's favor, a soldier's greatest strength is their comrades.

Harassing Strike

Beginning when you choose this archetype at 3rd level, when a creature you can see enters your reach, you can use your reaction to Shove the creature. To use this feature, you must be wielding a glaive, halberd, lance, pike, or spear.

Spear Fighting

Starting at 3rd level, when you wield a spear, its damage increases to 1d8, and its versatile damage increases to 1d10.

Formation Tactics

At 7th level, you bolster your allies when fighting shoulder to shoulder. While you have an ally within 5 feet of you who isn't incapacitated, you can use a bonus action to take the Help action to assist an ally's attack or a Strength (Athletics) or Dexterity (Acrobatics) check.

Foe of Darkness

Beginning at 10th level, your faith and training make you a daunting foe of dark creatures. Once on your turn, you can gain advantage on an attack roll or ability check made against a fiend, undead, or creature of shadow.

Give Ground

Starting at 15th level, once per turn when you are hit by a melee attack, you can choose to move 5 feet away from the attacker without provoking opportunity attacks. If you do, the attacker takes 1d6 damage of the type dealt by your weapon. To use this feature, you must be wielding a glaive, halberd, lance, pike, or spear.

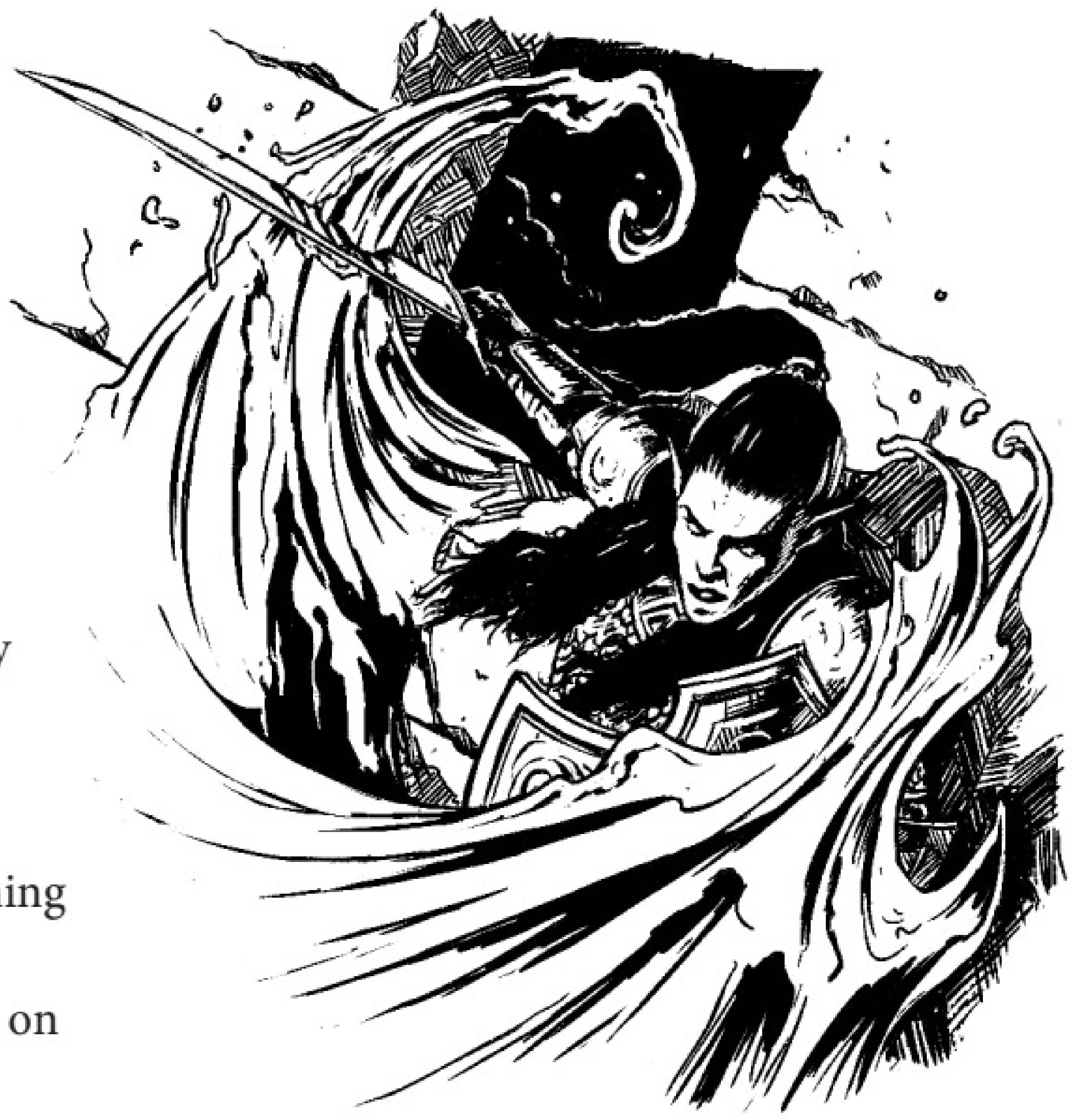
Khors's Protection

At 18th level, you have advantage on saving throws against spells.

If you fail a saving throw against being charmed or frightened, you can choose to succeed instead. You can use this ability a number of times equal to half your proficiency bonus.

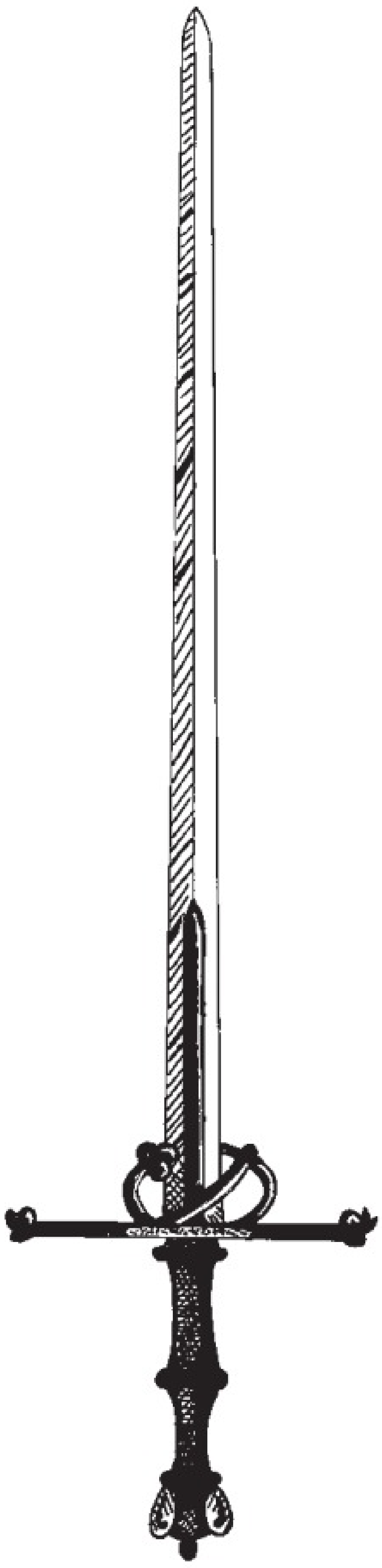
ROGUE: DAWN BLADE

Even the Order of the Undying Sun has need of those willing to get their hands dirty and to sully their honor in service of what must be done. The Dawn Blades are devout rogues, drawing divine power from Khors to strike as a sudden ray of searing sunlight in the darkness.



Dawn Blade Spellcasting

Rogue Level	Cantrips Known	Spells Known	—Spell Slots per Spell Level— 1st	2nd	3rd	4th
3rd	3	3	2	—	—	—
4th	3	4	3	—	—	—
5th	3	4	3	—	—	—
6th	3	4	3	—	—	—
7th	3	5	4	2	—	—
8th	3	6	4	2	—	—
9th	3	6	4	2	—	—
10th	4	7	4	3	—	—
11th	4	8	4	3	—	—
12th	4	8	4	3	—	—
13th	4	9	4	3	2	—
14th	4	10	4	3	2	—
15th	4	10	4	3	2	—
16th	4	11	4	3	3	—
17th	4	11	4	3	3	—
18th	4	11	4	3	3	—
19th	4	12	4	3	3	1
20th	4	13	4	3	3	1



The Dawn Blades are extremely controversial among Khors's followers as they fly in the face of the sun god's prohibition against stealth. And yet these faithful rogues still draw power from their devotion, which sparks fiery debate among the order's scholars. Whispers are beginning to circulate that the accepted doctrine of the faith might not be accurate.

Spellcasting

When you choose this archetype at 3rd level, you gain the ability to cast spells.

Cantrips. You learn three cantrips: *sacred flame* and two other cantrips of your choice from the cleric spell list. You learn another cleric cantrip of your choice at 10th level.

Spell Slots. The Dawn Blade Spellcasting table shows how many spell slots you have in order to cast your cleric spells of 1st level and higher. To cast one of these spells, you must expend a slot of the spell's level or higher. You regain all expended spell slots when you finish a long rest.

For example, if you know the 1st-level spell *guiding bolt* and have a 1st-level and a 2nd-level spell slot available, you can cast *guiding bolt* using either slot.

Spells Known of 1st-Level and Higher. You know three 1st-level cleric spells of your choice.

The Spells Known column of the Dawn Blade Spellcasting table shows when you learn more cleric spells of 1st level or higher.

Whenever you gain a level in this class, you can replace one of the cleric spells you know with another spell of your choice from the cleric spell list. The new spell must be of a level for which you have spell slots.

Spellcasting Ability. Wisdom is your spellcasting ability for your cleric spells since you learn your spells through prayer and devotion. You use your Wisdom whenever a spell refers to your spellcasting ability. In addition, you use your Wisdom modifier when setting the saving throw DC for a cleric spell you cast and when making an attack roll with one.

Spell save DC = 8 + your proficiency bonus + your Wisdom modifier

Spell attack modifier = your proficiency bonus + your Wisdom modifier

Spellcasting Focus. You can use a holy symbol as a spellcasting focus for your cleric spells.

Eyes of the Dawn

Beginning at 3rd level, you gain darkvision out to 30 feet, or your existing darkvision increases by 30 feet.

Dawn Strike

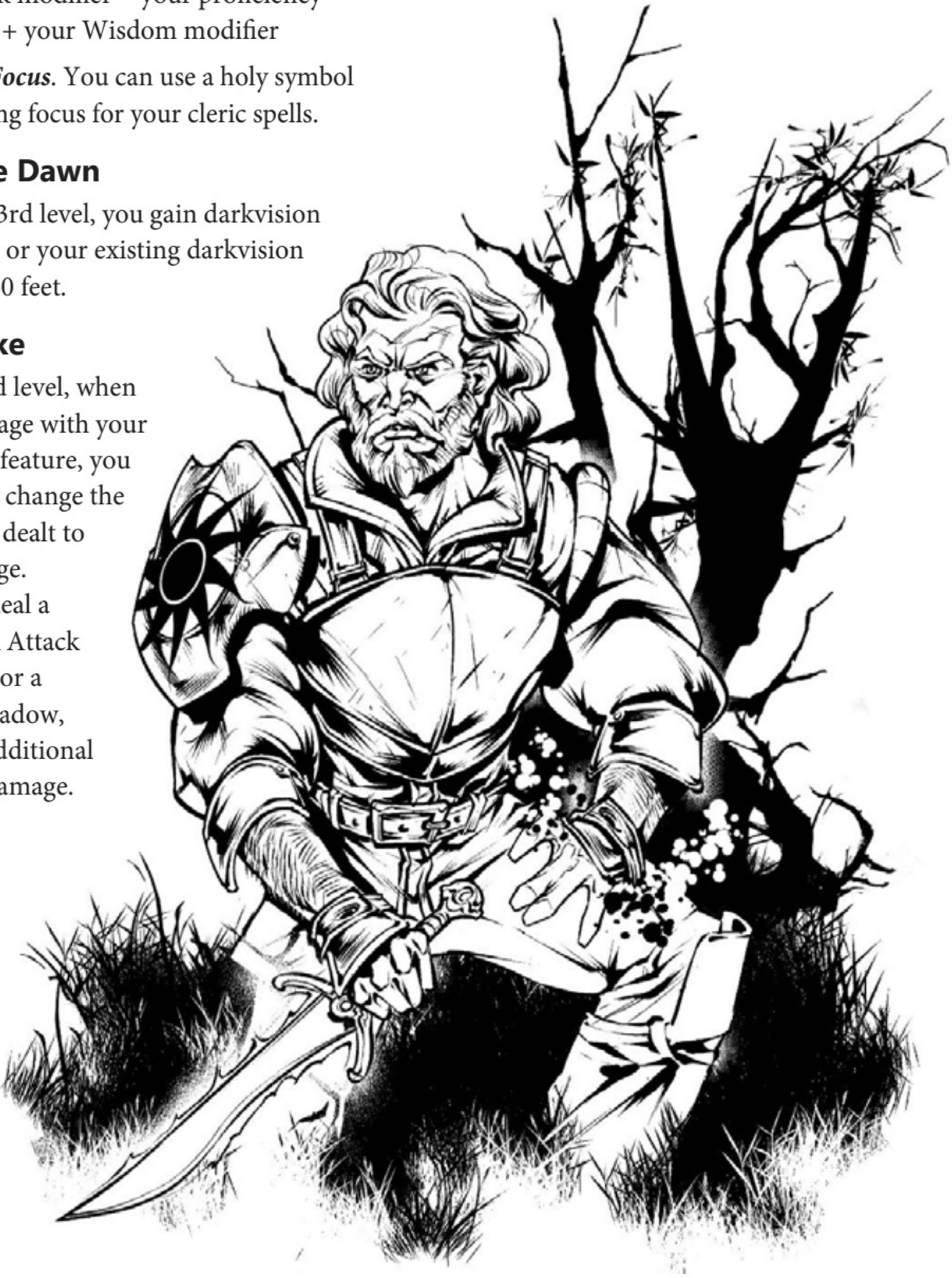
Starting at 3rd level, when you deal damage with your Sneak Attack feature, you can magically change the extra damage dealt to radiant damage.

When you deal a radiant Sneak Attack to an undead or a creature of shadow, you deal an additional 1d6 radiant damage.

Bolstering Light

Starting at 9th level, if you reduce a foe to 0 hit points with radiant damage, choose one of the following:

- Gain temporary hit points equal to twice your rogue level.
- End one condition affecting you. The condition can be blinded, deafened, or poisoned.
- End one curse affecting you.
- End one disease affecting you.



Sudden Illumination

Starting at 13th level, when you make an ability check, you can expend a spell slot to gain a bonus on the check equal to twice the level of the expended slot.

Dawn Flare

At 17th level, when you deal a radiant Sneak Attack (using your Dawn Strike feature) to a creature who can't see you, the creature must make a Constitution saving throw against your spell save DC. On a failed save, the creature takes 10d6 radiant damage and can't regain hit points until the start of your next turn.

Once a creature takes damage from this feature, it is immune to your Dawn Flare for 24 hours.

Magic Items

The Order of the Undying Sun keeps several magical relics. The order awards these items to knights who prove their devotion against foes born of darkness.

DAWN SHARD

Weapon (any sword or dagger), uncommon (requires attunement)

The blade of this magic weapon gleams with a faint golden shine, and the pommel is etched with a sunburst. You can command the weapon to shed dim light out to 5 feet, to shed bright light out to 20 feet and dim light for an additional 20 feet, or to douse the light.

The weapon deals an extra 1d6 radiant damage to any creature it hits. This increase to 2d8 radiant damage if the target is undead or a creature of shadow.

GRAVE WARD ARMOR

Armor (any), very rare (requires attunement)

This armor bears gold or brass symbols of Khors and never tarnishes or rusts. The armor is immune to necrotic damage and rusting attacks such as those of a rust monster. While wearing this armor, your maximum hit points can't be reduced.

As an action, you can speak a command word to gain the effect of a *protection from evil and good* spell for 1 minute (no concentration required). While the spell is active, if you are reduced to 0 hit points, you drop to 1 hit point instead. Once you use this property, it can't be used again until the next dawn.

LANTERN OF JUDGEMENT

Wondrous item, very rare (requires attunement)

This mithral and gold lantern is emblazoned with the sunburst symbol of Khors. While holding the lantern, you have advantage on Wisdom (Insight) and Intelligence (Investigation) checks.

As a bonus action, you can speak a command word to cause one of the following effects:

- The lantern casts bright light in a 60-foot cone and dim light for an additional 60 feet.
- The lantern casts bright light in a 30-foot radius and dim light for an additional 30 feet.
- The lantern sheds dim light in a 5-foot radius.
- Douse the lantern's light.

When you cause the lantern to shed bright light, you can speak an additional command word to cause the light to become sunlight. The sunlight lasts for 1 minute after which the lantern goes dark and can't be used again until the next dawn. During this time, the lantern can function as a standard hooded lantern if provided with oil.

LIGHTBREAKER

Weapon (pike), legendary
(requires attunement by a lawful good creature)

Lightbreaker is a pike made of pure-white polished wood with a gleaming silver and gold tip. Forged for a hero general of the Order of the Undying Sun, Lightbreaker served in battle against countless foes and sent hordes of evil creatures howling back into the darkness that spawned them. When its wielder was finally struck down, Khors looked down with pride and bound the hero's soul to the weapon. Now it is an even more vicious foe of evil and a valuable advisor.

Despite the holiness and prominence of the weapon, Lightbreaker's identity in life has been stricken from all memory and record, seemingly by Khors himself. The order rationalizes this with the belief that Lightbreaker has a great destiny, and that would be jeopardized if their foes learn enough about the weapon's past.

You have a +3 bonus to attack and damage rolls made with this magic weapon, and it deals an extra 2d8 radiant damage to any creature it hits.

Dawn's Radiance. Lightbreaker can choose to shed bright light in a 30-foot radius and dim light for an additional 30 feet. This is sunlight.

Destroy Darkness. If you reduce a fiend, undead, or creature of shadow to 40 hit points or fewer with Lightbreaker, the creature must succeed on a DC 15 Constitution saving throw or be destroyed.

Tactical Acumen. When you are targeted by an attack, you can use your reaction to impose disadvantage on the attack roll. You must be able to see the attacker to use this reaction.

Wise Counsel. Lightbreaker has the following skills: History +10, Religion +10.

Sentience. Lightbreaker is a sentient lawful good weapon with an Intelligence of 14, a Wisdom of 17, and a Charisma of 19. It has hearing and darkvision to a range of 120 feet.

The weapon can speak, read, and understand Common and Celestial, and it can communicate with its wielder telepathically. Its voice is resonant and deep and of indeterminate gender. While you are attuned to it, Lightbreaker also understands every language you know.

Personality. Lightbreaker is proud and devoted to the worship and purposes of Khors. It speaks with a commanding tone but is gentle and patient with those who exhibit pure intentions.

Lightbreaker's purpose is to oppose the spread of darkness and to shine the sun's purifying light upon those who can't stand against evil. It expects its wielder to conduct themself with honor and dignity.

Conflict occurs if a wielder routinely exhibits dishonorable behavior or relies too much on stealth and ambush in battle. Lightbreaker relentlessly chastises a wielder that accepts shadow magic or fiendish or undead gifts.

Creatures

The order boasts connection to a few unique creatures as well as soldiers and magics.

GLEAMING DESTRIER

The Order of the Undying Sun is known for its cavalry, both mounted knights and swift, light mounted scouts. In addition to the horses they breed and train, the order has a small number of mounts touched by the light of Khors known as gleaming destriers.

The destriers are similar to large, strong horses at first glance, and all have gleaming coats and flowing manes and tails. Colors tend toward white, either pure or patched. Their eyes give away the destrier's heightened intelligence, and they can even understand some language. They form fierce bonds with their riders and prove to be potent allies on the battlefield.

GLEAMING DESTRIER

Large beast, lawful good

Armor Class 11 (natural armor, 18 with plate barding)

Hit Points 30 (4d10 + 8)

Speed 60 ft.

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
18 (+4)	12 (+1)	14 (+2)	6 (−2)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)

Senses darkvision 60 ft. passive Perception 11

Languages Understands Celestial and Common but can't speak them

Challenge 2 (450 XP)

Illumination. At the start of its turn, the gleaming destrier can choose to magically shed bright light in a 20-foot radius and dim light for an additional 20 feet.

Trampling Charge. If the gleaming destrier moves at least 20 feet straight toward a creature and then hits it with a hooves attack on the same turn, that target must succeed on a DC 14 Strength saving throw or be knocked prone. If the target is prone, the destrier can make another attack with its hooves against it as a bonus action.

ACTIONS

Hooves. *Melee Weapon Attack*: +6 to hit, reach 5 ft., one target. *Hit:* 11 (2d6 + 4) bludgeoning damage plus 3 (1d6) radiant damage.

SUNMOTE

Sunmotes are celestial beings who serve as messengers and guardians for angels and deities of light. They appear as gleaming spheres of golden light, six to eight inches in diameter. They are sometimes found in service to clerics, paladins, and even wizards and the rare warlock in service to the Order of the Undying Sun.

SUNMOTE

Tiny celestial, lawful good

Armor Class 13

Hit Points 10 (3d4 + 3)

Speed 0 ft., fly 60 ft. (hover)

STR	DEX	CON	INT	WIS	CHA
6 (−2)	17 (+3)	12 (+1)	8 (−1)	12 (+1)	10 (+0)

Skills Acrobatics +5, Perception +3, Persuasion +2, Insight +3

Damage Resistances bludgeoning, piercing, and slashing from nonmagical attacks

Damage Immunities radiant

Condition Immunities petrified, prone

Senses darkvision 60 ft. passive Perception 13

Languages all

Challenge 1 (200 XP)

Aura of Menace. Any creature hostile to the sunmote that starts its turn within 10 feet of the sunmote must make a DC 10 Wisdom saving throw unless the sunmote is incapacitated. On a failed save, the creature is frightened until the start of its next turn. If a creature's saving throw is successful, the creature is immune to the sunmote's Aura of Menace for the next 24 hours.

Illumination. The sunmote sheds bright light in a 20-foot radius and dim light for an additional 20 feet. It can conceal this light when it hides.

ACTION

Light Ray. *Ranged Spell Attack:* +5 to hit, range 60 ft., one target. *Hit:* 10 (3d6) radiant damage.

Warding Aura (Recharges after a Short or Long Rest). The sunmote generates a magical aura within 20 feet of it. The sunmote and its allies within the aura have advantage on saving throws against spells and abilities created by aberrations, elementals, fey, fiends, and undead. Such creatures have disadvantage on attack rolls against warded creatures. The aura lasts for 1 minute or until the sunmote is incapacitated or dies.

VARIANT: SUNMOTE FAMILIARS

The sunmote can enter into a contract to serve another creature as a familiar, forming a telepathic bond with its willing master. While the two are bonded, the master can sense what the sunmote senses as long as they are within 1 mile of each other. If its master violates the terms of the contract, the sunmote can end its service as a familiar, ending the telepathic bond.

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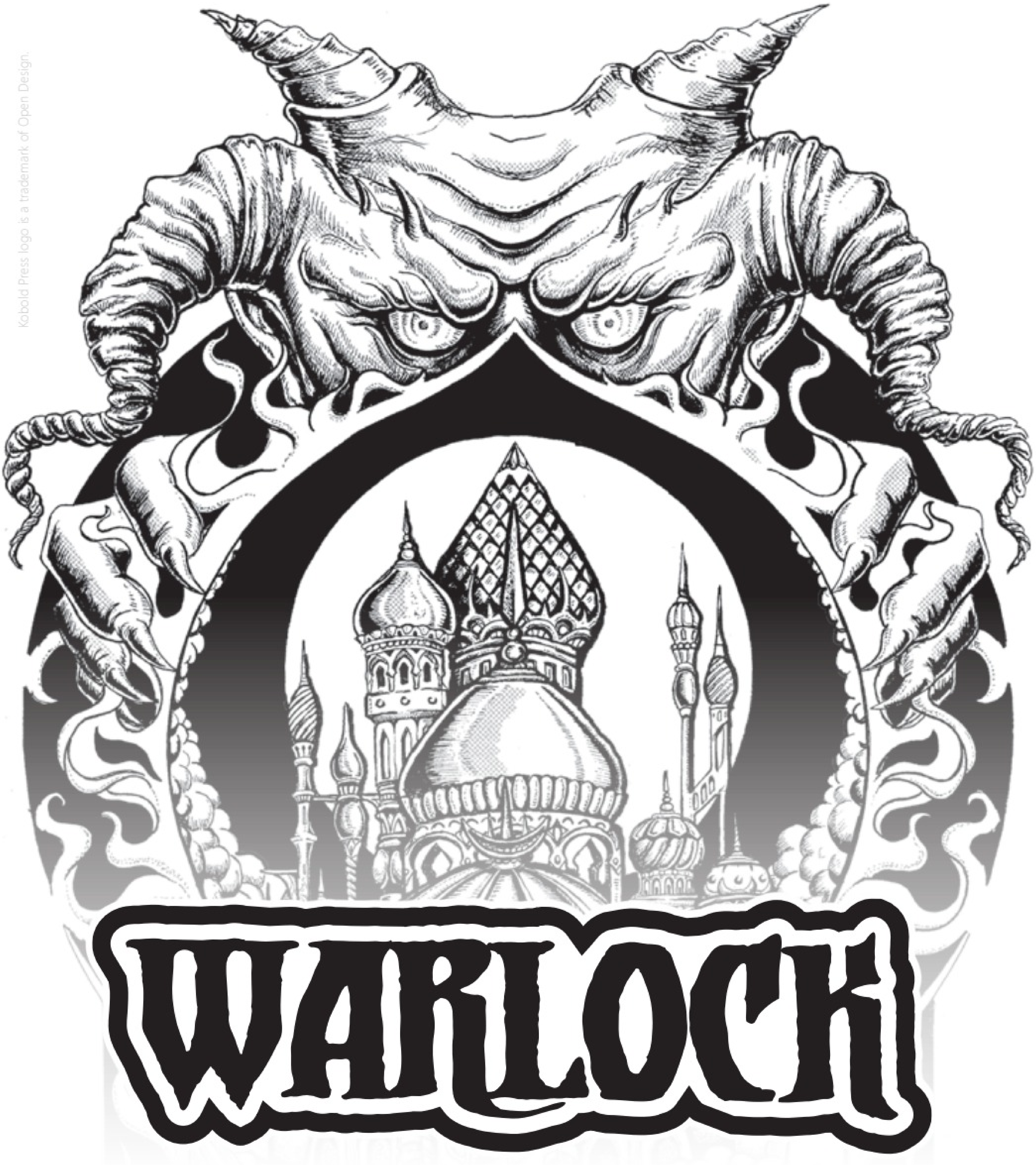

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